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ON THE DOT



CONTENTS

REGULARS

- 8 Ed's Note
- 10 Inbox
- 14 Bytes
- 28 home_coded
- 76 Mosh Pit

OPINION

- 14 Pixel Fix
- 16 The Game Stalker
- 62 Hardwired
- 82 Game Over

PREVIEW

- 38 The Order: 1886

REVIEWS

- 40 Reviews: Introduction
- 40 Mini review: Farming Simulator 15
- 41 Mini review: Revolver 360
- RE:ACTOR
- 44 Assassin's Creed Unity
- 47 Rugby 15
- 48 LittleBigPlanet 3
- 50 The Crew
- 52 SingStar Ultimate Party
- 53 Geometry Wars 3: Dimensions

HARDWARE

- 63 Dream Machine
- 64 Versus: Notebook GPUs: GTX 850M vs GTX 860M
- 68 ADATA XPG DDR4 2800MHz 16GB
- 69 COUGAR 700M gaming mouse / HyperX Fury 240GB SSD
- 70 AORUS THUNDER K7 Gaming Keyboard
- 71 Corsair K70 RGB Keyboard
- 72 Acer Aspire V15 Nitro Black Edition
- 74 Lazy Gamer's Guide: ASUS PB287Q True 4K ultra-high definition monitor



FEATURES

30 PENNY PINCHERS

Your guide to gaming on the cheap. Love games, but hate spending money? Hate games, but love free stuff? Either way, we've compiled this ultra-handly guide to some of the best free games out there that money can only kind of, sort of buy.

54 STASIS

Stasis is a bit like *The Dig*, but it's also not at all like *The Dig*. Spaceship, though! Lots of spaceship! And point-and-click adventuring! We're obsessed with this upcoming locally-made game, and we'd like you to share in our obsession.



ON THE DVD

DEMOS

Defense Grid 2 / iO / Movie Studio Boss: The Sequel / RTS Creator / Rugby League Live 3 Sign Motion

DRIVERS

AMD Catalyst Drivers 14.12 32/64-bit
NVIDIA ForceWare 347.09 WHQL 32/64-bit

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A long time coming



Hello February! The month of love, some say, but more pertinently it's the month of not much happening in the world of gaming. It's a strange time of year: we see one or two significant releases (*Evolve* should be out any day now), but the international industry tends to clam up until around April when things start to gather momentum again. I've never understood this practice, but hey, we take what we can get.

So we've taken what is usually a relaxed month and told it to get stuffed. This issue we make a big fat deal about one of the hottest local games I've seen in a long time – *Stasis*. I've been following the development of this game for years, and when the discussion for a February cover feature kicked off, I knew that this was the right time to spread the word.

This is only the second time we've had a local game for the cover feature (the first was *Chase: Hollywood Stunt Driver* in November 2002). Kind of shameful, really. Well no matter, this month we address our past transgressions and fill your face with eight pages of love for *Stasis*. I'm sure you'll enjoy reading about this fantastic looking game, and as always, feel free to share your feelings about this sort of coverage with us via email (letters@nag.co.za).

There's more to talk about! We've got a mega *Assassin's Creed Unity* review in this issue; we decided to push out the review by a month to give the game some time to settle in with a few patches, but unfortunately that proved to be a waste as it's still incredibly buggy (although not terrible, go figure).

We also have a great feature on free (or nearly free) games: 16 of them are listed and detailed, so the only thing holding you back now is your Internet.

And I'd like to welcome another new writer to the fold! Marco "Coco" Cocomello joins us to share his disappointment with *SingStar Ultimate Party*. Marco will take care of all sorts of party/dance/singing games going forward, so please give him a big round of applause.

I want to draw your attention to page 23, where you'll find a job posting. Sorry folks, this isn't a writing gig this time. We are in fact looking for a full-time sales person to join our team with NAG, IGN Africa, and rAge. So if you (or someone you know) have a passion for selling stuff and happen to be mad about the local gaming industry, be sure to drop us a mail once you've very thoroughly read the details on that page. Good luck!

Corporate bit: I'd like to give a shout-out to Appetite. This is a mobile phone app that you can use to place orders with takeaway joints. One of my biggest gripes is when I'm stuck on the phone reciting my order a hundred times over and now, *hell yeah*, that's not a problem anymore. Praise be! Grab it here – www.appetite.co.za – or with the QR code on this page.

That's all from me this month. I hope that you enjoy this issue of NAG!

Cheers,
-GeometriX



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Inbox

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letters@nag.co.za

Letter of the Month February 2015

From: Marko Coetzee

Subject: Too immersive?

For a while now something has really been bothering me, in fact it all started when I finished "The last of us". As amazing and challenging as the gameplay was, the thing that really gripped me was the story, the strangely lovable characters, the scenery and the developing relationships felt like a turning point for gaming to me, but even more so, a turning point for myself, because when I finished the game I felt empty inside, as if something was missing. Naturally I started playing "New game +", but I was astonished to see that I couldn't force myself to play further than the second chapter. Already finished with the story, the gameplay, amazing as it was, just didn't interest me. From there it was the same with every game: "Beyond: two souls", "assassin's creed" even "Battlefield". That feeling makes me long for the days where you could load up a game that you've completed a ten times already and enjoy it as if it was your first playthrough. So question this has all been leading to: Are the storylines of games becoming a tad bit too immersive or am I just forgetting the reason I started gaming?

I had the exact same "problem" that you described with The Last of Us. After finishing it, I immediately started up a New Game + but very quickly felt like there was no more meaning to the game. I had seen the best part of it, everything else would just be more challenging combat and sneaky bits, which, although fun, pale in comparison to the story and character development. I haven't played it since then.

I don't know if this really is an issue, though. I feel your pain, your inner conflict, but maybe you're just growing up a bit? The reasons that you started gaming don't have to be the same reasons that you're still gaming.

Like, I started gaming because I thought it was funny to make an alley

cat jump into windows and steal cheese (or something, I don't really remember). And street surfing along a highway and taking drinks from strangers seemed like a good idea at the time. I've moved on from those sorts of games, and nowadays I'm struggling to fully commit to an epic RPG, the sort of thing that I'd lose myself in for days, just a few years ago.

People change, the industry is changing, and all of this swirling chaos is bound to leave a few things displaced and rearranged. Sometimes those pieces land in more interesting places, though. As long as you're still enjoying the games that you play, you're doing okay! Ed.

THIS MONTH'S PRIZE

The "Letter of the month" prize is sponsored by the good folks at Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most inspired bit of wisdom of cleverness. **NOTE** / You can't change the games or the platform they come on.



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From: Luke Heaney

Subject: What is uplay?

Let me start off by saying that this is an awesome magazine, fact. My brother recently got far cry 4 limited edition for the pc and when we put it in our computer to do the installation. After that I clicked to play it and the word uplay appears so I create standard account and it says "unable to create your account right now as a Ubisoft sever is unavailable." I have tried to make an account since the 27 of December and am currently doing so. Do console peasants have to go through this, my internet speed is good so why do pc gamers have to go through this, why does the most superior platform have this, I mean what is uplay anyway does it even serve a purpose. Is it my internet connection or are the servers down? I researched it and it seems to be the same as steam why does Ubisoft have to have their own services for their games.

Hate to break it to you, slick, but the glorious master PC race has been sporting online DRM and content management software for a loooong time. Some would even argue that PC gaming is at the root of modern DRM. Yeah, these days console players are getting pulled into this horrible nonsense as well; at least we're all peasants now.

DRM is the great equaliser. Nobody is safe from it, unless you're a GOG type of gamer.

As for why Ubisoft have to have their own little thing, I don't know. EA does it too, Warner Bros. is getting into it as well, Blizzard has their own client. I guess everyone just wants to jump on the money ship that Valve is captaining, not really understanding how and why that vessel set sail in the first place. And let's not forget the utter tripe that Steam was when it first launched, forcing Half-Life 2 players to adopt this horrible, wonky new idea that we all seem to love now. Ed.

From: Connor Benn

Subject: Gaming Addictions

I have recently just turned 16 and a large percentage of my friends have given up gaming for various reasons like, "I'm too cool for this." and, "it's a waste of time." Despite some of my friends still loving gaming I can't help but get the feeling that it's weird for people my age to be into gaming. I still buy this same glorious magazine every month and viciously scan for the latest gaming news. But I feel like I'm the only one in my school



ON THE FORUMS

Like a baby bird pushing its way through the egg in which it has incubated for so long, it's the trials in life that make us stronger, better, birdier. Be that bird, poke through your egg shell and fly free. Join us on the NAG forums, we will be that rock-hard shell through which you must break www.nag.co.za/forums

QUESTION / What gaming-related New Year's resolutions do you never keep?

I don't need to buy games at launch.

- Gammaray

"I will finish my backlog."

- Toxxyc

I never keep any of my resolutions. It is the only thing I am truly consistent about.

- nukehead

This year I'm not buying any EA games.

- Zoop

I won't start a new game until I've finished one that I've already started.

- LazyDemoni

that does this and although I know I'll always ignore this feeling it is still there. I guess I can say I have a large gaming addiction and I'm not entirely sure if this is a good thing if the Nag community could share their thoughts I would greatly appreciate them and use them to set this feeling on fire and run it over with a bus. NAG MAG 4 EVER!!!

When I was 16, most of the people I knew were into gaming. I went to a pretty nerdy school, though, so I suppose that helped a lot.

What I didn't have at your age was kick-ass Internet. I think ISDN was just hitting the scene around that time, which is basically a really expensive phone line that's only a bit faster than a 56k modem. It was gross, but that was our best connection back then. But you, you've got stuff! There's a whole world of strange online communities just waiting for you to join in (please don't join anything that's too weird. Or do, just, you know, "be safe"). And don't forget about LANs! They're still going strong in this country and every year we put on a little thing called rAge. It's a great place to meet fellow gamers.

PS: In a couple of years you'll be in varsity or college, and you'll be amazed by the number of gamers that will suddenly surround you. Don't lose sight of the things that are important to you, but do try to get a bit of balance in your life. Ed.

From: David Lavers

Subject: A Console Experience on a PC

Making your PC a main source of entertainment is huge. It's an open system with near to no limits and has the power to make a PS4s blush.

Problem is, sitting at an uncomfortable desk and chair, using a mouse and keyboard. Is reason enough to give up on that dream.

Till I found this free software called Kodi. Load your digital collections and update your fanart, boxart and info automatically.

Best part is kicking back with Xbox 360 controller in hand and navigating your entire computers library's.

It's scary Microsoft hasn't designed a OS to cater for couch potatoes. I thought Windows 8 was their awakening but alas maybe only when steam OS gains traction.

I think SteamOS is going to be



Pieter de la Rey, "This is a digital illustration of Dracula that I drew with Photoshop. Hope you guys enjoy it."

4 This is the best bit of fan created artwork we received at NAG this month. If you insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the NAG logo you might also end up here for your three lines of fame. Just don't go and stick the NAG logo on a picture and send it in because that is dumb and dumb people don't win things.



This month's prize courtesy of Prima Interactive is *Battlefield 4* for Xbox One, valued at R599.99



exactly what you need. Or at least Steam's Big Picture mode for now.

As for why Microsoft isn't tackling the living room, that's an easy one: it's called Xbox. They'd be competing with themselves if they took to the living room in full force on the PC. Far easier to tell would-be Steam Machine buyers to just get an Xbox One instead of hooking up an expensive PC to your TV.

Kodi sounds pretty cool. I haven't heard of it before and I'll definitely take a look. Thanks for that! Ed.

From: Chantel Young

Subject: Find happiness

So I've been reading your magazine for the past 8 years, and I figured it's about time I write the letter of the month. I am a nurse working in a trauma unit. I'm the one who patches you up when you are in a motorbike accident or drag you out of the car when you're having a heart attack.

Working 12 hour shifts to help the doctors save lives, and I love my job. MY husband introduced me to PC gaming, and that time I thought he was silly. My first game I ever played was Diablo 2 and then he introduced me to Star Craft and after that, Need for Speed Underground (we can all remember the old games). Those days we only had a Pentium 4. Now we have 2 PC's and a Play station 3, and I can't wait to get home after a shift and play Guild Wars 2, Call of Duty (all of them), Resident Evil, etc....

That helps me tap down after a long day at work, and I am certain games teach you to plan strategically in life, with anything you do. I just want to compliment you on your great

magazine and how much I enjoy the articles and reviews, introducing me to new games. Having something in my life that relaxes me after work, otherwise I think I'll go mad. Taking out my frustration and blowing something up makes me happy, and I believe happiness is what life is all about. Find something that makes you happy.

I don't have much to add to this – I think you've hit that rusty old nail right on the head. Thanks for sharing your positive attitude with us, and keep patching up people who do dumb things! Ed.

From: Cameron Carr

Subject: Next gen consoles data consumption

I recently purchased an xbox one and the price was decent enough. For the first few days everything was smooth, just me playing halo online against some friends. But after a few days of gaming online and watching YouTube I noticed that my monthly data balance was complete (which was odd since this has never happened to me before) I was so frustrated as I could not do anything for the rest of the month (except for think about what took all my data) I realized that it was my xbox, it had taken over 120 GB of my 150 GB per month contract, So I played for the net month sparingly but it still took most of my data so I resorted to upgrading to an ADSL cable with unlimited amount of data (which is costing me heavily) so I just wrote to inform everyone reading this, think twice before buying and intending to use a next gen console online =

THE SHORTS

[extracts of LOL from the NAG audience]

"A heartfelt f#ck-you' to all the trolls in the world."
– Chris de Wet

"I ended up getting Shadow of Mordor when I found out that Dying Light was exclusive to next gen"
– Muhammad Jhavy

"Isn't that why games were made to take us away on a epic adventure"
– Jarrod Londt

Yup, current-gen consoles are as close to being PCs as you can get these days. Just without all the viruses and driver installations (well, so far, at least). But you raise a good point: these consoles and their games are data-hungry.

OS updates are a gig or two on any day, and game updates have been known to push the 40GB mark.

I do think that uncapped is the way to go for gamers, though. I'm pottering along on a capped connection at home but at least I can keep my libraries topped up with uncapped at the office. It's not just the way of the future any more, it's the way of the present. Ed.

ON FACEBOOK

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NAGMagazine

Emilio Govender

You guys 'n this magazine rock, this is a really an interesting magazine that speaks my kinda language, keep up the good work.

Gideon Kotze

Oh magnificent leaders of all things gaming in southern most Africa, benevolent Lords and Lordettes of the great constellation of NAG Prime... Santa skipped my ass this year...

Bradley Jordan

Basic game-play in Sim City, when building more houses you need more power stations and not rely on the a few oldies. I think I should get President Zuma and Eskom a copy.

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PIXEL FIX

Far from the tree by Miklós Szecsei



The moment I'd finished watching the *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* teaser trailer for *Episode VII*, the first thought that popped into my mind was, "flip, gran is going to love this."

My gran, you see, is a massive nerd, and at 90 years of age she readily devours all manner of science fiction and fantasy epic films and novels. She's just ploughed her way through *A Song of Ice and Fire* and is decidedly miff about the fact that Martin is yet to finish the books. "I'm 90. I don't have forever you know. And if I peg before he's done, I'll be livid!"

I grew up watching *Star Wars* with my gran. I'm pretty sure she's seen *Empire* and *Jedi* more than 30 times each thanks to my young, obsessive childhood, and her unwavering patience; the patience that would shine outwardly to onlookers, but that hid the fact that secretly she was willing to watch endless amounts of *Star Wars* because she was as big a dork as me.

Growing up, we lived in Johannesburg while my grandmother lived in Cape Town. She would visit us in Jo'burg at least once a year, and she'd always be willing to watch any new science fiction or fantasy film I'd found. *Willow*, *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*, the plethora of

awful *Lord of the Rings* movies that were made before Peter Jackson made his – you name it, we rented it. Her endless enthusiasm and fascination with the genres I'm convinced had a massive developmental impact on my young self. And for that I will be eternally grateful to her.

So you can see why *Star Wars* and my gran have become inseparable in my psyche. The moment the initial prequel films were announced, we began counting the days to their release. By that stage we had moved to Cape Town, so being able to watch *Episode I* with her in a cinema was all kinds of fantastic. When I was younger, and the two of us were watching VHS recordings of *A New Hope*, never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that there would be new *Star Wars* films, and that we'd get to watch them together on the days they were released. Of course, we had always hoped that Lucas would do a new set of films that took place after *Jedi*, but new *Star Wars* was new *Star Wars*, and we weren't going to complain.

But now, now exactly what we had hoped for all those years ago is coming true. *Episodes VII* to *IX* are coming, with Luke, Han and Leia in tow. It is the perfect scenario for our mutual love of this universe. The only problem is that my gran is not doing so well.

She finally had the strength to watch the *Episode VII* teaser trailer a few days ago. My mum sent me a picture of my very frail grandmother, propped up in bed and watching the trailer on a cell phone. I haven't seen her in over a year, and it breaks my heart realising that I probably won't get to finish the *Star Wars* story with her. The chances of her getting to watch *Episode VII*, the film we've both wanted for more than 25 years, are very slim. She is bed-ridden, tired, and extremely fragile thanks to her severe osteoporosis. But in that picture my mother sent me, I could see her science-fiction geek twinkling behind her tired eyes as the trailer played out before her.

With rather serendipitous timing, my two-year-old son has begun recognising *Star Wars* characters. As I type this, he's asleep in his crib, clutching an R2D2 plushy. He calls it "big uh-too", and the R2D2 USB flashstick I have is called "bubby uh-too". A few days ago I thought he should probably have some context about where R2D2 comes from, so we watched the first episode of *Star Wars: Rebels*. He sat transfixed throughout the 20 minutes, shouting "Uh-too!" whenever the droid came onto the screen. At the end, when the episode's credits rolled to that familiar theme tune, I asked him what he thought. He just said, "wow".



Image credit: Paul Kang (paulkang91.tumblr.com)

Grand Theft Auto Online heists detailed

Better 17 months late than never...

One of the most hyped features of *GTA Online* was the inclusion of four player co-op multiplayer heists. Now, after numerous delays and endless silence, Rockstar has finally released some news and info about the upcoming heist missions.

For a start, heists will only become available once you're over level 12, and hosting one will require that you own a high-end apartment for the planning stage. The host's duties don't end there, as whoever sets up the heist will need to front the cash for expenses and only gets a payout after the heist is successfully completed.

Otherwise, *Online* heists closely resemble their offline counterparts. Once a job is planned, a series of preparation missions will need to be completed by your team before you properly hit the targeted bank/store/whatever.

According to Rockstar, one of the reasons for the numerous heist delays has been balancing, and the *Online* heists have been carefully crafted to keep all members of the team entertained and constantly busy and give them the feeling that they are integral to the job.

Rockstar further went on to announce that there will be five distinct heists available, with about four missions attached to each. This means 20 distinct missions that will all have replayability due to player choice and set-up options.

Although there isn't a concrete release date, we can expect heist missions to (finally) be available early this year.



Sony sells 18.5 million PlayStation 4 consoles

After mere five days into 2015, Sony announced that they'd hit a new sales milestone for the PlayStation 4. Since the console's release in November 2013, Sony has sold 18.5 million consoles across the globe. In November last year, Sony had shipped 13.5 million consoles worldwide. The boost in sales was thanks to this recent festive season that saw 4.1 million PlayStation 4 consoles being purchased between November and December 2014. Sony has also announced that PlayStation Plus now has more than 10.9 million subscribers and that the PS4 is well on its way to outselling the PlayStation 2.

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THE GAME STALKER

by Pippa Tshabalala

Line up everybody, line up, line up

2015 looks like it's going to be a good one. Yes we say this every year (ok not every year, but it feels like it), but I say this because 2014 seems to have been a pretty awful one for most people I've spoken to. In the gaming sense however, 2014 had some amazing gaming highlights.

Likewise 2015 has some massive titles on the horizon, and now that we've finally caught up to the rest of the world and have the option to choose between the PS4 and the Xbox One (and PC of course, please don't shoot me!) we can finally appreciate the titles (and of course the exclusives) in all their glory.

Just in case you need a little refresher (I'm getting old too, don't worry), let me just remind you of what's coming up. In no order. Just as I think of them.

Batman: Arkham Knight. Even with the one that wasn't as good as the others (shhhh! We don't talk about that!) I still love this franchise. Can't help it. The fact that I don't even mind that you get a lame trophy for becoming Batman in *Arkham City* (seriously, it's the name of the game, it's a dumb achievement) means that any game in this franchise will always be on my must play list. Always. Because y'know... I AM BATMAN. Ahem.

Then *Bloodborne*. Because, just because. I didn't even really love *Dark Souls*, but I just want to play this SO. MUCH.

The Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt. Honestly I shouldn't even have to elaborate on this because I've waxed lyrical on practically every platform you can find me on. Geralt of Rivia. Monsters. Mythology. This is so my kind of game that I want to melt into a little puddle every time I think of it. I'm even ok with it being delayed.

No Man's Sky. I honestly don't know what to expect from this procedurally generated game, but the thought of it really excites me. Like, really. You're a planetary explorer and planets and features of the universe are all procedurally generated, which means the game is in essence constantly changing, with a possible 18 quintillion planets. QUINTILLION. Whaaaaat!?

The Order: 1886 is something that I think has been high on everyone's radar for a while now, and yes, damn it, I'm excited. Yes, I've also said that about every game on this list, but I wouldn't be adding games I thought looked lame now would I? Alternate universes, knights and monsters, Arthurian legend. Yes, the nerd in me is jumping up and down in excitement.

Ok, ok, last one... I don't have many words left... ummm – right, I've got it! I know I'm leaving out loads of titles here, but I mention *Tom Clancy's The Division* because I'm not normally a big Tom Clancy person, and this looks amazing. The trailer honestly gave me goose bumps.

And now I'm out of words. Damn. Look out for some awesome games this year! Hooray!

Halo 3: ODSST coming to Halo: The Master Chief Collection

"To show our appreciation to the Halo community for their support..."



Microsoft and series custodians 343 Industries have had a very rough time getting *Halo: The Master Chief Collection* up and running properly. Since launch, the game has been plagued by multiplayer connectivity issues and other bugs. This resulted in many people battling to find multiplayer lobbies, and as any *Halo* fan will tell you, multiplayer is the cornerstone of the franchise.

A number of the issues have since been ironed out through numerous patches and updates to *The Master Chief Collection*, but the damage has already been done to the IP. In order to smooth things over, Microsoft and 343 Industries have promised to bring the most excellent *Halo 3: ODSST* to *The Master Chief Collection*. The best part is that for everyone who has been playing *The Master Chief Collection* between 11 November 2014 and 19 December 2014, they will be getting *ODSST* for free.

This is an entire remastering of *ODSST*, much like the remastered versions of previous *Halo* titles that already populate *The Master Chief Collection*. It will only be the main *ODSST* campaign, so don't expect the multiplayer portions any time soon. Still, that's some fantastic news considering what a great entry into the IP *ODSST* proved to be.

In addition to bringing a remastered *ODSST* to the collection, Microsoft and 343 started handing out one month of Xbox LIVE Gold memberships to all *The Master Chief Collection* players as well. If you were playing the collection between November and 19 December last year, then chances are you've already been gifted the one month subscription. You can expect *ODSST* sometime during our autumn 2015.

Ubisoft survey teases future *Far Cry* locations



Fans of Ubisoft games are no strangers to surveys, as the development company frequently sends them out to receive feedback and shape future releases. Well, Ubisoft has sent out another survey in the wake of *Far Cry 4*, asking gamers what locations they would like to see the franchise visit next.

Some of the locations seem sensible, like a game set in *FC4*'s Shangri-La, or the cocaine-trafficking jungles of Peru, or even a sequel to *Blood Dragon*. The rest are all majestically insane.

Humans versus vampires *Far Cry*? Check. Zombie *Far Cry*? Check. How about *Far Cry* on a dinosaur island? Check. There were more options including a Mad Max-style post-apocalypse, spaghetti Western, Alaskan-wilderness, or even a Vietnam War setting.

While there's no guarantee that any of these settings will actually be used, it is interesting that Ubisoft is asking for feedback regarding this. Otherwise, it will be really interesting to see how a few of these translate into a *Far Cry* game.

Another *Destiny* cheat surfaces from *The Dark Below*

With the first piece of *Destiny* DLC *The Dark Below* out in the wilds, a new exploit has surfaced, and this one is a little hilarious. In order to beat Crota, the very tough final boss in the DLC Raid, all you need to do is have whoever is hosting the game pull out their network cable the moment Crota's shields go down and he falls to his knees. If the timing is right, he'll stay down and won't attack or regenerate his shields. Job done. Obviously Bungie is aware of this net-code exploit and this will probably be patched out by the time you read this. Still, it's rather amusing.



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The only good viking is a dead viking



There's no part of that headline that's true, really. Vikings are lovely whether they're dead or alive. *Stick It To The Man* devs Zoink! Games clearly agree, having recently announced *Zombie Vikings*, an outrageously zany "four-player co-op stab-you-in-a-gut-a-thon" (their description, not ours) that's themed around Norse mythology. In it, Odin summons four of the "most fearsome Zombie Vikings" to retrieve his last remaining eye after Loki steals it.

You'll have to traverse a variety of wild locations and battle a ridiculous menagerie of foes on your quest for ocular redemption. Players can use their friends' lost body parts as weapons, which sounds amazing. Zach Weinersmith, renowned for the webcomic *Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal*, is handling the game's writing. "The first scene they had me write involved rescuing Odin's eye from a witch's ass," says Zach in a press release for the game. Classy!

Elevator of doom



Croteam teaches pirates a lesson. Again.

This isn't exactly the sort of thing we'd file in the "Important News" box, but it sure is hilarious. Back in 2011, developer Croteam used an unbeatable pink scorpion to punish players who pirated *Serious Sam 3: BFE*, making it impossible for them to complete the action-packed FPS if they'd acquired it using less-than-legal methods. And now they're up to similar antics with their new first-person puzzler *The Talos Principle*.

Naturally, the new "bug" went public when a player took to the game's Steam forum page to complain that they'd gotten trapped in an elevator upon accessing the second floor of the game's tower, thereby stifling their progress in the game. "Congratulations, you must be the first one to show to the Internet world what Croteam did this time to punish pirates," said someone in response to the bug report. "You should be proud of yourself, it will be all over the Internet in about 30 minutes, I'd say."

The anonymous responder was correct, and *The Talos Principle*'s publisher Devolver Digital soon tweeted a screenshot of the Steam forum conversation and explained that it wasn't a bug at all, but a very intentional inclusion. We can't help but laugh whenever we hear stories such as this one, and given how overwhelmingly positive the response to *The Talos Principle* has been we're hoping that pirates get the message and hand over a bit of cash for a legitimate copy of the game.

Killzone: Shadow Fall resolution dispute lawsuit set to proceed

In August last year, Sony was on the receiving end of a class-action lawsuit filed by Douglas Ladore. Ladore alleged that the graphics in the multiplayer portion of *Killzone: Shadow Fall* were blurry when compared to the main game, an observation that had been looked into by Eurogamer's Digital Foundry some months before Ladore moved to sue Sony. Digital Foundry discovered that the multiplayer portion of *Shadow Fall* doesn't run in native 1080p, but rather uses some very clever upscaling methods called "temporal projection". That technique essentially tracks the positions of pixels in an image over time, and then predicts where those pixels will be in a future image. It then combines the "history pixels" with new pixels to create an upscaled image. So while *Shadow Fall*'s multiplayer is still displayed at 1080p, it is not, strictly speaking, "native" 1080p.

This, Ladore alleged, was false advertising on Sony's behalf, and he filed a class-action lawsuit through a law firm with a history of gaming industry lawsuits (including the recent *Alien: Colonial Marines* lawsuit). It was initially thought that this case would be thrown out, but a US district judge in California has given the lawsuit the green light.



Fullbright's next is Tacoma

Gone Home is special, an action-free narrative journey seen from a first-person perspective that once again proves that games don't need explosions to keep you engaged. Its developers at The Fullbright Company have announced their next game, and it'll follow a similarly narrative-centric formula. In *Tacoma*, you'll play a female astronaut tasked with exploring the titular space station *Tacoma*, and discovering what life is like for a group of people trapped in a fancy metal bucket floating through space.

Throughout *Tacoma* you'll be interacting with a world suspended in microgravity, so objects float around the station, which Fullbright has said allows for some really exciting exploration opportunities. Like *Gone Home*, it promises to focus on the smallest details of everyday life as you learn more about the station's inhabitants, unravel their stories and experience the effects of living in the void first-hand. *Tacoma* should be out in 2016, and it's already looking beautiful.



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Get back here, Stalker!

GSC reappears with a secret project in tow



GSC Game World, the original developer behind the *STALKER* series of super-stark post-apocalyptic shooters, has miraculously reopened after going belly up back in 2011 and has announced that it's working on a secretive new project. Valentine Yeltyshev, who has been identified as a former GSC employee and is now a "spokesperson for the studio's return", had a few things to say to Gamesindustry.biz about the new project and the dubious nature of West Games' supposed successor to the *STALKER* throne:

"The market we're in is quite old fashioned. They're not 16 year olds, they're 25-40 years old. We don't think free-to-play is the right model for the game we want to make. So we're making an old-fashioned, full price game, we think our audience will be happy

about that. We're expecting a lot of our old audience!"

"I don't really know enough about them, but the story is quite funny," he said of West Games. "These guys were basically promoting themselves as being the *STALKER* team, that they were working on *STALKER*, but that's not true. When we were working on *STALKER 2*, we were also planning on releasing a browser game based on *STALKER* so we could keep the audience engaged until released. That project was never finished. There were mistakes. But the guys at West Games, that was the *STALKER* project they were working on — a Flash game. So when they promoted themselves as having worked on *STALKER*, I was quite surprised."

Scarlett Johansson to star in *Ghost in the Shell* adaptation



DreamWorks' live-action adaptation of the popular and iconic franchise *Ghost in the Shell* has just added Scarlett Johansson to the cast. Johansson will reportedly be playing the lead role of Matoko Kusanagi, a role she was offered back in mid-October.

Writing and production work on the film began in 2008 when the licence was bought by DreamWorks, and the director's chair is being filled by Rupert Sanders (also responsible for *Snow White and the Huntsman*). There's still no word on filming or release dates, but that should give us enough time to catch up on the anime series.

Microsoft allows developers to access more power in Xbox One

The Xbox One has eight cores but developers have only ever had access to six of them. The remaining two cores were barred off by Microsoft to run the console's background apps and voice commands for Kinect 2.0. Except Microsoft has now allowed developers access to a seventh core, albeit only about 50-70 percent of that core. This was discovered when an Xbox One SDK was leaked by a hacking group. The SDK was analysed by a number of tech-savvy groups that discovered Microsoft's change in stance regarding core access for developers.

Space Pirates and Zombies 2 promises space pirates, zombies



In spite of the unfortunate acronym emblazoned across its forehead, the original *Space Pirates and Zombies* (or *SPAZ* for short) was an enjoyable space-borne romp. Its sequel (*Space Pirates and Zombies 2*, or *SPAZ 2*, which is a doubly unfortunate acronym) promises to be brilliantly ambitious. Developer MinMax says that the game will be set in a universe that doesn't revolve around the player, existing and evolving without the need for player involvement.

The world will be populated by 200 AI-controlled captains who are able to do everything that the player can, such as dynamically forming factions, capturing territory

and building structures. Each game will play out differently depending on the fully unpredictable actions of the captains, and there are galactic story events that will occur and force the player to adapt to survive. You'll have to design your own ship using a range of modular parts, each with their own stats and physical properties that are affected by realistic physics. Longer ships are more difficult to manoeuvre, for example, and if you block turrets they will be unable to fire. You'll have to take into account the mass, location and shape of ship parts in order to ensure that it behaves in the desired fashion.

Humble Bundle raises \$50 million for charity

If you've purchased games or eBooks as part of a Humble Bundle, then you'll know that you can pay what you want to. You also choose how your money is split between the creators of the content, Humble Bundle itself, and charities.

Humble Bundle has been going for four years now, and with millions of people purchasing bundles, charity donations have managed to rack up a whopping \$50 million, or about half a billion rand. The money has been donated to more than fifty different charities spread across the entire planet. Some of the charities are involved in things like cancer research, getting water to poor

communities, emergency relief, books and education, conservation, and helping to bring gaming to disabled players.

"We just want to extend our eternal gratitude to everyone involved in the Humble Bundle community," Humble Bundle co-founder John Graham said in a video announcement.

"To the game developers and content creators who make the awesome things that have been a part of our promotions, and to the consumers, the gamers, for your continued support of all the things we do, without you guys this would not be possible and we've done something really, really big here. Thank you."



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Far Cry 4 incident raises Xbox One questions



A few Xbox One users ran into some trouble recently while trying to play their digital copies of *Far Cry 4*. Instead of running the game, the system spouted an error code and asked gamers if they owned it. Users even reported that re-installing the game didn't work either. The worries didn't end there, as *Far Cry 4* was also mysteriously removed from the Xbox One Games Store. Once the game was returned to the marketplace, the problems seemed to resolve themselves.

The incident called Xbox One's DRM practices back into question, as it

seemed like some of *FC4*'s digital copies failed because they did not pass an authentication check. Microsoft's answers to these concerns have been somewhat contradictory. In a statement, they claimed that if a user owned a game they can "initiate a re-download whenever they please – even if the game has been delisted from Xbox Store". That sounds fair, but keep in mind that they don't mention being able to play the game, just download it again.

In other news, we can probably expect another condescending video from Sony at some time in the future.



Tekken 7 gets Middle-Eastern fighter called Shaheen

Game director Katsuhiro Harada has unveiled a new fighter joining the roster for the upcoming *Tekken 7*. Shaheen is a Middle Eastern man and the first of his ethnicity to join the franchise. The *Tekken* series has always had a multicultural (and multi-species!) group of fighters, and it looks like *Tekken 7* will continue that tradition. *Tekken* has also proven to be a wildly popular series in the Middle East, so it's extra neat that the developers are catering for a big chunk of their market.

Be one with the bush

Fans of hiding in bell towers and/or shrubbery while shooting people in the face across improbable distances will be happy to know that a third game in the *Sniper: Ghost Warrior* series has been announced. Simply named *Sniper: Ghost Warrior 3*, developer CI Games is promising Serious Business this time around, admitting that the previous two games were very obvious about the fact that they were created on a tight budget, and vowing to give this new title all the spit and polish and bearded warriors that

gamers would expect of a big-budget AAA release.

"The *Sniper: Ghost Warrior* franchise is one of the most popular in the CI Games portfolio with over 5.5 million copies sold, so we're investing a significant amount of effort into the third installment," said CI Games CEO Marek Tyminski. CI reckon the game will feature "non-linear, sandbox-style gameplay on large open-ended maps", so you'll be free to approach scenarios any way you please. The game's due out in 2016.



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The Witcher 3 system requirements revealed



If you're planning on playing the upcoming *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* on PC, then you should start planning on upgrading your machine. In a recent tweet from developer CD Projekt RED, the minimum and recommended specs for the massively anticipated RPG were detailed. Caution: words and numbers inbound.

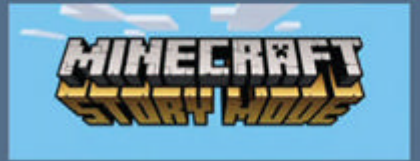
Minimum will require 40GB of hard-drive space, a decent quad-core processor (anything better than a Phenom X4), 6GB of RAM, a GeForce GTX 660 or better, 64 bit

Windows 7, and at least three days off work to try out the game.

Recommended specs, on the other hand, will likely require the sale of your least favourite kidney/sibling. For that you'll need a Core i7 processor, 8GB RAM, GeForce GTX 770 (or better), and 40GB of drive space.

The Witcher 3 was recently delayed, so you'll have at least until May 19th, 2015, to upgrade your rig. Or just get it for PS4 or Xbox One if you don't mind being sneered at by PC elitists.

Tales of the craft: Minecraft set to receive a story mode



In a move that's got more than a few people scratching their heads, Mojang has announced that it'll be partnering with *The Walking Dead* / *The Wolf Among Us* devs Telltale Games to release an episodic series of single-player, story-driven adventures set within the *Minecraft* universe. It's a surprising move considering that *Minecraft* has always been centred on players enjoying their own emergent, dynamic storylines set within the confines of the game's rules, but on the other hand it was always inevitable that such an immensely popular IP would eventually branch out in different directions – especially after Microsoft coughed up nearly \$2.5 billion to acquire Mojang.

"*Minecraft: Story Mode* will be an all-new narrative-driven game series developed by Telltale in collaboration with Mojang," say this new game's creators. "Set in the world of *Minecraft*, the series will feature an original story, driven by player choice. It will not be an add-on for *Minecraft*, but rather a separate stand-alone product that will premiere in 2015 on consoles, computers and mobile devices."

In other *Minecraft* news, original creator Markus "Notch" Persson recently bought a mansion in Beverly Hills, California for \$70 million, which is the highest price ever paid for a Beverly Hills home. Yowzers.

Sons of Anarchy mobile game announced

Fans of the popular *Sons of Anarchy* TV show will be pleased to know that the series is finally getting a video game adaptation. Subtitled *The Prospect*, players will be cast in the role of a newcomer (called a "prospect") to the motorcycle club.

Following an announcement in December, a short trailer showed off cel-shaded graphics, first-person gameplay, as well as characters not seen in the show. Described by Kurt Sutter (creator of the series) as a "high-end mobile game", *The Prospect* will be releasing episodically, beginning at an unannounced time in 2015.



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Comet could be an entire Destiny expansion pack



A leaked image of what looks like an internal Bungie roadmap for *Destiny* developments has leaked online. The image shows a timeline that details the DLC releases planned for the game. The first two pieces of DLC are already known about: the recently released *The Dark Below* and the upcoming *House of Wolves*. After those two items, things get rather interesting on this alleged roadmap.

Something referred to as "Comet" stands out on the development timeline for *Destiny*. Judging by its placeholder image on the roadmap, this could be a huge expansion pack

that might even get a physical retail release. Keen-eyed Reddit users managed to discover that "Comet" is supposedly coming out in September this year, and will bring with it: 12 new story missions, one new Patrol, one new Raid, three new Strikes, one new Public Event, three new sub-classes to play, a new map called "Hive Ship", and a boost to the "base level" bringing it up to 30.

After "Comet" there are another two pieces of DLC planned for *Destiny* before the roadmap ends. It's likely that that'll mark the end of *Destiny*'s content and that *Destiny 2* will follow.

Thimbleweed Park smashes Kickstarter goal

Proving once again that the Kickstarter community loves itself some point-and-click adventuring, the new adventure from *Maniac Mansion* creators Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick breezed past its Kickstarter target of \$375,000 and went on to reach a final tally of \$626,250. That's a bump of 67 percent, which meant that various stretch goals were met, including translations for five languages, Android and iOS ports (in addition to PC, Mac and Linux versions), and fully voice acted dialogue for the English language version.

"The support for *Thimbleweed Park* has been completely and totally overwhelming," said Gilbert and Winnick. "Once again, thank you thank you thank you for believing in us. We're going to make the best damn point &



click adventure game possible and we could not have done it without your help." If you missed the Kickstarter campaign and would still like to contribute to *Maniac Mansion*'s spiritual successor, you can do so on the game's website.

Caption of the month



Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of *Rugby 15* for PS4 from Apex Interactive. Send your captions to letters@nag.co.za with the subject line "**February caption**".



NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR

"Dammit, Phil, I've been looking for your contact lens for hours; the least you could do is help."



LAST MONTH'S WINNER

"Hold E to obtain Ebola"- Ryden



SUPPORT LINES

Got a legal boxed game and need some technical help? Before you call please do the following. Update your system software, drivers and have a look online for a game patch. Just these simple tasks eliminate 93% of all problems – it's a made up statistic but probably close enough.

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Roxy hunt

Send your sighting to letters@nag.co.za with the subject line “**February Roxy**”, and of course your contact details, and you could win a prize. Feeling lucky punk?



January winner

Monica Lindeque, page 50

This month's prize

Marvel Dice Masters valued at R225. Sponsored by Skycastle Games.



Nintendo pulling out of Brazil



In a surprising recent announcement, Nintendo of America have stated that they will no longer be distributing hardware or software in Brazil.

Citing Brazil's notorious import taxes for consoles, Nintendo said: “unfortunately, challenges in the local business environment have made our current distribution model in the country unsustainable. These challenges include high import duties that apply to our sector and our decision not to have a local manufacturing operation.”

This may change in the future, as Nintendo has promised to “evaluate how best to serve our Brazilian fans in the future”.

New Baldur's Gate coming



Did you hear that? It was the sound of millions of RPG fans collectively whooping for joy.

The news comes courtesy of Beamdog, the developers who made the recent Enhanced Editions of both the BG games, as well as *Icewind Dale*. Built in the same Infinity Engine that powered the original games, the new BG will be set between BG1 and BG2.

Beamdog has further confirmed that more information, such as release date and story details, will be released in early 2015.



home_coded

EXPOSURE FOR SOUTH AFRICAN INDIE DEVELOPERS

by Rodain Joubert

Geographic location: -33.92543,18.424533

Favourite flower: Aruncus dioicus

Enjoys sedate activities such as cloud watching and candle making.

THE MANDATORY MAKE GAMES REMINDER!

No catch-up piece would be complete without specifically mentioning the largest and most influential game development association in South Africa – Make Games SA. Recognised in the eyes of the government (insert necessary dun-dun-dunns here) and frequented by the core of South Africa's development scene (including the rockstar-successful crew of Free Lives, the pixel gods behind *Broforce*), MGSA is a hub for community news, events, tip-swapping and support for anybody interested in cobbling together some of their own digital fun. Visit at www.makegamesa.com.

The local studio catch-up

If you haven't read this column before, welcome aboard! Have a biscuit. Oh, but you're such a charmer! Go ahead, take two. Yes, this is a lovely time to come into the world of local game development. Welcome again.

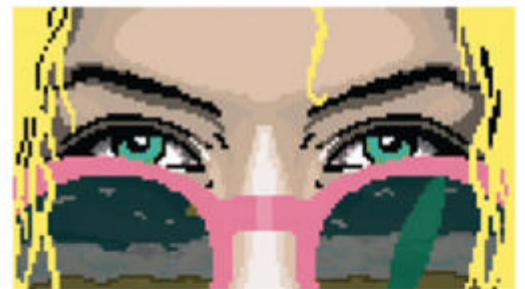
To new and old alike, I'm happy to report that local game development has been ever-so-vibrant for the past couple of years, and the community's recent months have been among its strongest (involving several local game festivals and at least one Jacuzzi-laden mansion party). As the new year is still young, now's probably the best time for a quick recap. What have some of the studios covered in 2014 been doing with themselves since they were last tapped on the shoulder? Did they curl up and die after the ink dried on their articles? As it turns out, not at all.

First up is a look back at *Cool Your Jets* (coolyourjets.co.za), a company that typically does all sorts of graphic and motion design. After directors Matthew McFarlane and Ben Rausch magically decided at the same time that they were passionately driven towards game design, they stormed onto the local

development scene with colour and vigour, participating in a multitude of game jam projects such as *Kick In The Door* (which still enjoys prominence as a party-and-expo title) and well-received Ludum Dare entries like *Star-Crossed Lovers* and the more recent *Bionic Bliss*.

Their persistence and inspiration is enviable, and their approach is solid: lots of small, experimental, *interesting* games aimed at immediate audiences. They already have a super-collaborative project planned for 2015 (*Dis Ons Konfyt!*), which will ideally see them producing no less than 12 distinct games over the coming year amidst all the other exciting stuff they already do. Keep tabs on these people. If nothing else, you'll probably enjoy their hyper-indie punk attitude.

Persistence has also remained a trait of the team at Clockwork Acorn, a trio of code-happy developers who want to hit full-time indie development by making smart and interesting games. Although they have a healthy spread of curious prototypes under their belt thus far (including an intriguing spaceship



Cool Your Jets

Caelum



builder called *Caelum*), they've established particularly close ties to the community on their stealth game prototype *Agent Unseen*.

Aside from seeking regular feedback, they recently "donated" this prototype to a local game audio competition, adjusting their code to let external sound wizards plug in as easily as possible. Clever move, and really helpful: this is just one of the ways in which opportunities have started opening up drastically for local game musicians and sound engineers.

Follow these guys if you want lessons in building clear and meaningful games without much reliance on art. Take a look at their website (clockworkacorn.com) for a bunch of their lovingly-presented prototypes.

If you're less coder and more artist, on the other hand, take a look at Twoplus Games (twoplusgames.com), a studio driven by Steven Tu who, during the course of 2014, waded deeply into the world of game programming and got by well enough to create – and demonstrate – a wide variety of projects. Though he keeps active and has enjoyed a few successes (including one cleverly-drawn card game, *Cartel*), perhaps his most notable achievement is the completion and release of his minimalist iOS zombie runner, *Dead Run*.

Tu originally built this game with humble goals and simple mechanics – the idea was for him as a non-programmer to create, publish and market a game in his spare time that would be simple, effective and worthwhile (with customisable hat options, because everyone loves those). Tu has since shared a lot of his knowledge about the particular approaches that artists can take to get into game development, as an eager blog poster, community member and one-time guest on CliffCentral. Feel isolated from making digital wonders because you don't have the coder's voodoo? Look this guy up.

Of course, it's not just the new young things that have been active in 2014. The grizzliest veteran of them all – Celestial Games (celestial-games.com) – has been doing a lot of promising work over the past year. Those who followed the local scene in the long-

long-ago (the before times of the '90s, when cellphones couldn't think for themselves yet) will know these guys to be SA's premier game developers, operating in an era when such a dream was still almost impossible to achieve.

After the notable *Toxic Bunny*, however, they seemed to spend at least a decade in relative silence – barring the solitary release of an HD update for that caffeine-driven lagomorph. Eventually, studio head Travis Bulford began stepping up his engagement with the local dev community again, taking his experience, connections and can-do attitude from the early days and showing a degree of growth and adaptability that, in all honesty, took me by surprise. Now a regular community member and avid game producer, Bulford is starting to demonstrate his value and versatility in event organising, the recruitment of fresh blood and – of course – the revival of their game production!

No longer content to ride on the wave they'd established long ago, Celestial has been embracing new trends and pushing out content. Their puzzle platformer *Montez* (covered in July last year) is just one of many ventures that include competition entries, random prototypes, tech demos and promoted products. Their current darling is a flight combat arena shooter called *Battle Arena Drones* (*BAD*), a *Descent*-inspired multiplayer blaster that they've been working on since the earlier parts of last year – check the boxout for more info.

Covering the full list of studio developments over the past year would demand way more than these two humble pages could provide (it would probably require an entire issue dedicated to home_coded, which I'm told is impractical), but in the coming months we'll be exploring some of the rising stars of 2015, along with more write-ups about related groups such as hardware builders (custom controllers for the win!), game musicians (the lesser-known heroes of the local scene) and initiatives to promote game development in local schools and other educational institutions.

Last year was amazing for the local scene. This one has the potential to be better.

ON THE DISC

Mentioned in the article is Celestial Games' arena shooter called *Battle Arena Drones* (battlearenadrones.com), a copy of which is included on this month's cover disc (look for it under "Early Access"). Players engage in competitive spaceship-blasting mayhem within futuristic indoor battlegrounds. Described by the developer as "*Descent 2* PvP with a few twists", the game has had a much more open development process than Celestial's earlier work, providing an early beta test program to South Africans and maintaining a dev report on the Make Games SA forums.

Dead Run



Kick in the Door



Star-Crossed Lovers



Unseen Agents



PENNY PINCHERS YOUR GUIDE TO GAMING ON THE CHEAP

Games are expensive, and it's way too early in the year to be sad about that. With some titles going for as much as R800 these days, it's a good idea to keep your options open when it comes to funding your gaming habits. So we thought it'd be a swell idea to put together a convenient list of games that you can play right now (or, you know, *later*, once they've finished downloading), for a total cost of sweet bugger-all.

Of course, "free" doesn't always mean "free" these days. Almost every game we've listed here has some sort of micro-transaction method to buy more hats or shoes or Swords of Winning +1, but we've chosen games that are generally pretty fair in this regard, because we care <3.

HEARTHSTONE

DEVELOPER: Blizzard Entertainment
WEBSITE: eu.battle.net

In the future it's likely that Blizzard's *Hearthstone* will be referenced as the quintessential free-to-play game. It is entirely possible to play this game forever without spending a single cent on it. And play it forever you likely will because it is as close to a perfect game as you can get: streamlined, entertaining, easy to learn but hard to master, and unrelentingly addictive. In fact, the experience of *Hearthstone* is so great that you almost feel compelled to pay Blizzard at least *something*. It's a collectible card battling game set in the *Warcraft* universe. You pick a familiar *Warcraft* hero and create a deck of thirty cards to take into battle with you. One-on-one battles can be played against AI opponents or online players. In-game community interaction is, cleverly, limited to a set of predefined emotes so you're free to play the game without fear of verbal abuse from online assholes. Outside of the game, a gargantuan community thrives with numerous international tournaments and a handful of South African ones to take part in. Monthly seasons and in-game rankings also aim to scratch that competitive itch some might feel. You can spend actual money on blind card packs that contain five cards, or you can buy entry into the Arena mode. Alternatively, single-player Adventure Mode expansions are available for a price. Failing which, you can save your in-game gold winnings and buy card packs and expansions with that instead. This is the free-to-play game to end all free-to-play games.



PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES 2

DEVELOPER: PopCap Games
WEBSITE: www.popcap.com/plants-vs-zombies-2



Officially publisher EA's most successful mobile game to date, *Plants vs. Zombies 2* is already nearly two years old. It makes this list, however, thanks to the constant trickle of updates and added content. Since launch, there have been five world expansions, and a sixth one, *Frostbite Caves*, is scheduled to be out by the time you read this.

If you've played the original *Plants vs. Zombies* then you'll know what to expect, but if you're new to the series then know that this is a tower defence game like no other. You place plants in five rows to defend against a constant wave of shambling zombies. Plants vary in their method of dispatching the undead, and are often pun-added delights such as the Bonk Choy plant that pummels zombies into submission. A healthy smear of tongue-in-cheek humour pervades this title and undoubtedly adds to the overall charm.

In *Plants vs. Zombies 2* you'll travel through time to various periods and locations like Ancient Egypt and the Dark Ages. Zombies change with the time period but your plant weaponry remains constant. Various game updates have added a phenomenal variety of new plants for your arsenal, but this is perhaps where the game's biggest criticism comes in: a lot of these plants are hidden behind micro-transaction pay walls of between R30 to R40 per plant. Likewise, unlocking new worlds can be paid for, or you can leave it to chance to collect the required keys by simply playing the game.

PATH OF EXILE

DEVELOPER: Grinding Gear Games

WEBSITE: www.pathofexile.com

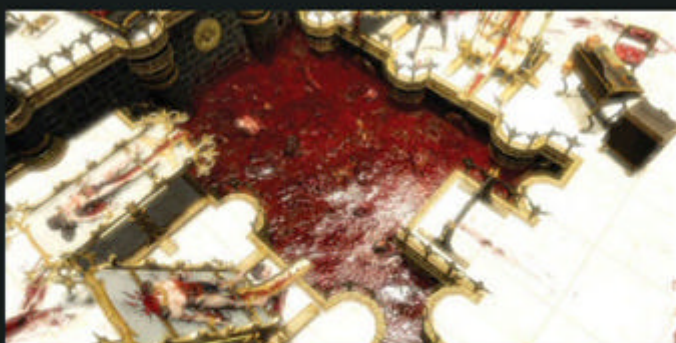
You know what was really difficult? Waiting for *Diablo III*. Action-RPG fans the world over found different ways of dealing with the wait, like playing *Titan Quest*, but the good folks at Grinding Gear Games had a different approach to the wait: they made a game.

First released back in March 2013, *Path of Exile* is a dark and atmospheric online RPG. Players pick from seven varied characters, then start off marooned on the prison island of Wraecclast with nothing but the rags on their backs and a world full of dungeons to loot. Online gamers are all on the same session, but most environments will be randomly generated for each instance.

The fact that a game this polished and jam-packed with content is free should be a lesson to developers. There are micro-transactions, but spending cash only gets you aesthetic items which are not needed to play. There is PvP, a recent expansion pack, and hours of hack-n-slash joy to be had here, all without dropping a single rand.

There are other interesting aspects. For one, the passive skill-tree in this game is massive, almost gigantic enough to generate a gravitational field. Also, this game is great for streamers and its developers encourage gamers to stream and monetise their gameplay.

If you're in the mood for a dark action-RPG, or if you want to experience some serious value, you can't go wrong with *Path of Exile*.



POKÉMON TRADING CARD GAME ONLINE

DEVELOPERS: Multiple

WEBSITE: www.pokemon.com

The worst thing about *Hearthstone* is that it has no theme song. But *Pokémon*, on the other hand, has a really catchy theme song. So catchy that it's playing in your head RIGHT NOW.

The bulk of the game is spent battling against other Pokéfans online, and it's a fun representation of the real-life card game. It's also regularly updated, so new cards are constantly filtering in.

It's not without some problems. The interface is rather clunky, and the music will quickly make you reach for the mute button. More seriously though, it is intensely grind-heavy. Players have the option of buying booster-packs or decks with real money, or they can begin what amounts to a second job and play tons of games for in-game currency. It's quite disheartening, but players can build a decent collection without paying a cent.

The best thing going for the game is its ties to the real-life card game. Inside most modern boosters and decks will be a redemption card, and using that will get you a digital copy of what you just bought (the booster pack will be randomised). This means that if you're collecting in real-life, you can easily grow your online collection at the same time without spending extra.

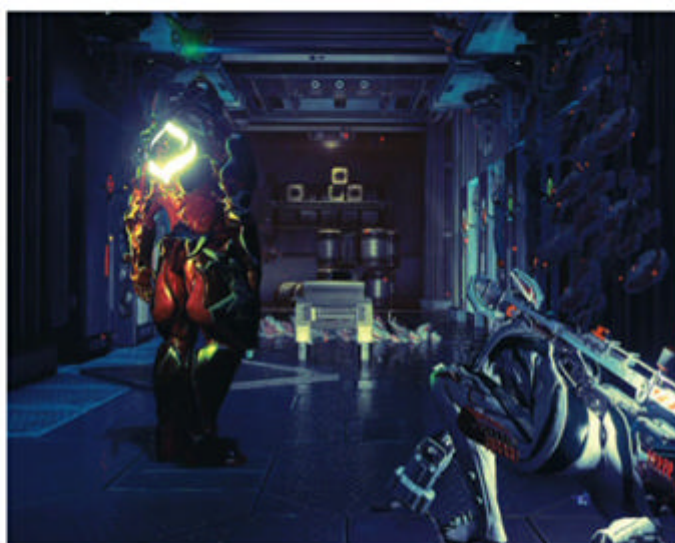
If you want to test this trading card game before investing, or want it as a training tool, or just as something fun to play when the *Hearthstone* servers go down, you won't go wrong with *Pokémon*.

MARVEL HEROES 2015

DEVELOPER: Gazillion Entertainment
WEBSITE: www.marvelheroes.com

If you've ever played *Diablo III* or *Path of Exile* and thought, man, this would be so much better if I was Wolverine or Squirrel Girl or Silver Surfer or Doctor Strange (or any popular Marvel hero), you're in luck. *Marvel Heroes 2015* originally launched with a bit of a rocky start, but has in the last year turned into an excellent free-to-play game that doesn't try to sneak into your wallet. It has a decent campaign (solo or cooperative), over-the-top visuals for the super-powered fights, and a continually expanding end-game in the form of raids.

Gazillion has been incredibly fair with how the game's F2P structure works: you can try any of the starter heroes, then pick one to unlock. As you play, you earn Eternity Splinters which can be used to unlock other heroes permanently. The main things you can spend money on are the purely cosmetic and optional costumes. Or, if you're too impatient to wait, you can spend some money to unlock the hero you want immediately. There's a lot of content, and the game is continually being updated. The only downside to the updates: they are often, and can be quite big (we're talking over 1GB per update), so be warned. The in-game community is pretty friendly, and often talks about comic book related stuff. A few people can be jerks, so we advise turning on the language filter for the kids. Also, don't ask in chat "how do I unlock Batman" unless you want abuse.



WARFRAME

DEVELOPER: Digital Extremes
WEBSITE: www.warframe.com

This game has come a long way since its early days in beta. A hardcore science-fiction run-and-gun shootbang with strong melee weapon action, *Warframe* puts you in control of a powerful Tenno (basically a space ninja). As you take on a variety of missions (solo, but preferably cooperative), you earn experience for your Tenno "frame", guns, floating sentinel robot pet that shoots things, and more.

The frame you use determines your powers. The Rhino has a mighty stomp that's so strong it slows time around you; the Nyx can take over the minds of enemies and have them fight for her; the Loki can make every enemy in the room drop their weapon. There are over 30 frames, and you can spend money to buy the one you want immediately or take the time to build them yourself for free. Like most free-to-play games, the only thing that you have to spend real money on is vanity cosmetics, like swank helmets and neon trimmings for your frames. It can take a while to farm specific boss fights for all the parts needed to build a frame, but if you enjoy doing the missions it doesn't take that long. Content patches add in new features all the time (most recently, *Zone of the Enders* style spaceflight missions), and there is a pretty expansive guild system where you get to build and decorate your own dojo. The community can be a bit standoffish, since most players are very focused on their own goals.

HAWKEN

DEVELOPER: Adhesive Games
WEBSITE: www.playhawken.com

Hawken is *Quake* with mechs. It's a fast-paced first-person shooter with a few neat tricks. Since you're running or boosting around in a mechanical mech and not a marine meatsuit, you can side-boost, 180-quick turn, and pull off neat tricks like shutting down to avoid being seen on enemy radar. It's not the slow-paced plodding of *MechWarrior Online*, more like a rocket-propelled deathmatch in agile bipedal tanks. It looks great too, with a very distinct Eurasian aesthetic we don't see too often.

If you don't spend any money, it will take a while to unlock new mechs, better guns and new utility power-ups like deployable turrets. The mech you start in quite literally looks like a microwave oven on chicken legs. It's a bit embarrassing, since everyone in the match can clearly see you're a newbie. As you fight through the various modes, like team deathmatch or the more objective-based Missile Assault, you earn rank points and credits. After you raise your rank enough, you can spend credits to get better mechs, guns, and various modules to improve things like accuracy or weapon power. The core game is solid, the combat fun. The community seems very quiet, almost reserved. You can buy more powerful mechs using real money if you're impatient, which does highlight the slight "pay to win" issue the game has. Skill can only get you so far against an opponent in a superior mech. *Hawken's* future is unclear at this point, so we'd advise not spending real money on it yet.



QUAKE LIVE

DEVELOPER: id Software
WEBSITE: quakelive.com

Quake Live has been around for years now, but this free-to-play first-person shooter was recently given a kick in the popularity pants when venerable dev id Software decided to release the game on Steam, which quickly boosted the number of players racking up the frags on its servers. A flurry of unpopular balance changes arrived to coincide with the Steam launch in order to make the game more newbie friendly (things such as automated strafe jumping and a Lightning Gun damage decrease), but the good news is that it's still loads of fun regardless.

In essence *Quake Live* is a retooled *Quake III Arena*, introducing a number of significant mechanical tweaks to what is arguably the greatest arena FPS ever created. Slicker, cleaner visuals are joined by updated versions of beloved maps from *Quake's* history, and while certain features like clearly visible timers on weapon/power-up spawns are sure to anger veterans, there's currently an active, seemingly supportive and mostly polite South African community playing a variety of game modes (including Clan Arena), so you're sure to find some frantic, gib-filled fun within.

Money comes into play in the form of a "Pro" subscription, which costs around R50 a month and grants you access to a number of benefits, including the right to set up custom servers – but thankfully the meat of the game isn't hidden beneath a pond full of cash-hungry money-piranhas, and there's no pay-to-win here. It's not really a replacement for *Quake III*, but it is a worthwhile, conveniently accessible alternative.



UNDERHELL

DEVELOPER: Mxthe

WEBSITE: www.moddb.com/mods/underhell

Underhell is technically a mod, but it feels inappropriate to classify it as such; it's a game in its own right, and although still incomplete, it features more content than many of today's AAA titles. Based on the Source engine, the title places you in the boots of silent protagonist Jake Hawkfield who has to deal with his wife's death, rescue hostages, cope with prison life, and survive a zombie outbreak – and that's just in the prelude and first episode!

The game's ideas could hardly be called original, but what sets it apart is how it skilfully melds together so many FPS and horror clichés to form a coherent whole, and still delivers a satisfying gaming experience. It manages to switch between stealth, survival, exploration and all-out frag-fest without ever feeling disjointed or out of place. And it's completely free.

To get it, you'll need Steam. In the application, go to "store", "library" and select "tools" from the drop-down menu. Scroll down until you see the Source SDK Base 2007 and double-click to install. Next, get the mod proper from the site and install into your Steam's "sourcemods" folder. Restart Steam to see it in your library.



ALIEN SWARM

DEVELOPER: Valve

WEBSITE: store.steampowered.com/app/630

Some of you may remember a mod for *Unreal Tournament 2004* called *Alien Swarm*. Much like other maps/mods such as *DotA* and *Team Fortress*, Valve took it upon themselves to hire the team responsible and develop a new game as a showcase for their Source technology.

The new version is a standalone title that simply requires a Steam account to play. It's a gorgeous and creepy top-down shooter that invokes imagery from the *Alien* movies and a number of similar titles such as Team17's awesome *Alien Breed* trilogy.

The game features a single-player campaign that's a ton of fun on its own, but the real meat of the experience is the co-op mode. You and up to three of your mates can choose between four character classes, each with their own statistics and unlockables. Better still, it features a bunch of achievements for all you OCD completionists out there.

If you love twin-stick shooters and you have some friends that can be coaxed into playing, there's no reason not to experience what is arguably the best and prettiest free shoot-'em-up on the Internet.



O.A.D.

DEVELOPER: Wildfire Games

WEBSITE: www.playOad.com

Fans of *Age of Empires* and *Empire Earth* will feel right at home with *O.A.D.* The game is an RTS romp set in ancient times where players must lead one of several civilisations to victory. All standard strategy tropes are present, though this title has a noticeable tilt towards economic as well as military considerations, with players often having to decide to expand one at the expense of the other.

A feature worth mentioning is that military units can also take on the jobs of average citizens – mine, chop wood, tend to farms, and erect buildings – though at a reduced pace. Nonetheless, it helps them to remain useful even when not currently in battle.

The graphics are absolutely gorgeous, especially for a free game, and invoke the feeling of a prettier, more modern version of the aforementioned *Empire Earth*. Music likewise is soothing and the speech is acceptable without getting too repetitive or annoying. The biggest selling point is the AI, which is surprisingly formidable even on the lowest difficulties. Of course, things are multiplayer-ready, so if you and your mates are up for some old-school RTS action, give it a go. Bear in mind that *O.A.D.* is still in alpha and some bugs are present, but it's updated regularly and is extremely playable.

TEAM FORTRESS 2

DEVELOPER: Valve

WEBSITE: www.teamfortress.com

What has two teams, nine entirely unique player classes, over 50 maps, loads of game modes, about a zillion megatons of zany, weapons-grade fun, and costs absolutely nothing? It's a new game we've just invented, but because it's probably (...definitely) never actually going to get made, *Team Fortress 2* is basically exactly the same and you can play it now. Since its October 2007 launch, Valve's other vaporware game (*Team Fortress 2* was in development for nine years) has captured the hearts, minds, and enemy intel packages of millions of players around the planet, and even now, more than seven years later, *Team Fortress 2* still features regularly in the top five most played games on Steam so you know it's got that something special. And we don't mean the flamethrower, but that too.

With the exception of the rather excellent Mann vs Machine co-op survival mode, *Team Fortress 2* features mostly competitive, objective-based gameplay and requires some serious collaboration between team players for the big win. If you're the sort of gamer who prefers to squat in glitched geometry and pot-shot enemy faces for rage points, this is not the game for you.

Unlike some other free games, *Team Fortress 2*'s micro-transactions are entirely restricted to custom cosmetics and gear – most of which is created by community modders – and nothing that gives paying customers any real advantage over everybody else except maybe some max swag factor.



TRACKMANIA NATIONS FOREVER

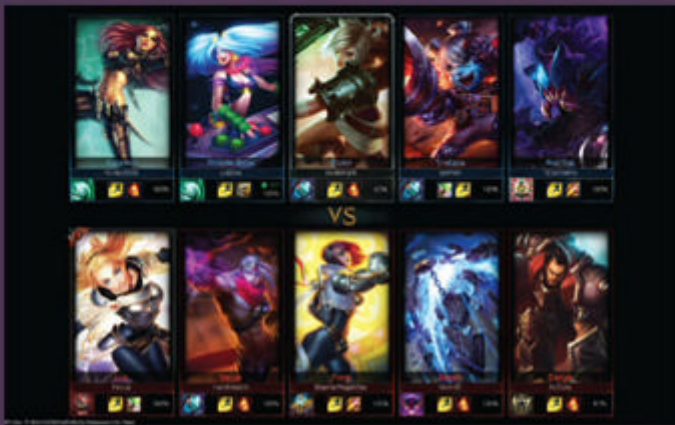
DEVELOPER: Nadeo

WEBSITE: www.trackmania.com

The *TrackMania* series is one of the strangest things in the business. Made up of a mix of racing games spanning locations and styles, *TrackMania* tends to be a solid mix of silly and challenging, with *TrackMania Nations Forever* taking both of those crowns.

Nations Forever is a multiplayer game in which a number of players get together to see who can set the fastest lap time within ten minutes of racing. At the end of each race, the winners are announced and then the next track loads up – simple as that. You'll find tons of highly active servers to choose from, each with its own unique line-up of tracks from the familiar sort to the utterly insane. Thanks to *TrackMania*'s fantastic map editor, some of the tracks are works of genius or art – others are awful and will make you hate yourself and the track's creator.

Since *Nations Forever* is entirely free, there's nothing to blow your dosh on here, but it's pretty likely that anyone who spends enough time with this game will be inclined to buy one or two of the other *TrackMania* titles for access to more vehicle styles, track pieces, and settings.



LEAGUE OF LEGENDS

DEVELOPER: Riot Games

WEBSITE: euw.leagueoflegends.com

Leaue of Legends is a MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) game that incorporates elements of real-time strategy as well as role-playing in a top-down perspective. In it, two teams of five champions start on opposite ends of the map, with the goal being to destroy the enemy's Nexus. The three lanes leading to each Nexus are guarded by towers and AI-controlled minions, which need to be destroyed. This will earn you gold which can be used to purchase in-game items and consumables from the shop. Completing a match earns you IP (Influence Points) which can be used to permanently unlock champions.

The number of playable champions is 123 of which ten are on a weekly free rotation. You can play this game without spending any actual cash, however Riot Points (RP) can be purchased using real money in order to unlock additional in-game content such as skins, icons, etc.



SMITE

DEVELOPER: Hi-Rez Studios

WEBSITE: www.hirezstudios.com/smite

Smite is an action MOBA that is played using your WASD keys, in third-person perspective. It's made up of session-based combat where two teams consisting of five gods each work together in three lanes by destroying enemy defensive structures, such as towers and Phoenixes, in order to reach the opposing team's Titan. As your gods level up they earn gold, which can be spent on items and upgrades. Playing matches earns you Favor which can be used to permanently unlock champions and some cosmetic skins. You can also use Favor to rent gods that you don't own for a limited time.

In total there are 62 playable gods with a weekly free rotation of five of the gods. Five gods are permanently automatically unlocked when you create your account, so you basically have ten to pick from when you start the game. Gems can be bought using real money which unlocks gods, skins and voice packs.



DOTA 2

DEVELOPER: Valve Corporation

WEBSITE: www.dota2.com



competitive MOBA comprising of strategy and action, and played from a top-down perspective, *Dota 2* features just a single map but seasonal events introduce additional game modes for a limited time.

Two teams, called the Radiant and the Dire, of five players spawn on opposite ends of the map and work together to destroy the opposing team's central base structure called the Ancient. Creeps and towers in each of the three lanes have to be destroyed along the way. In-game items and consumables can be purchased from the shop using gold earned from killing creeps and enemy heroes.

Dota 2 works slightly differently to *LoL* and *Smite* in that the total number of playable heroes is 109, of which all are available to play immediately. This does make the learning curve slightly more difficult having so much choice from your very first game. Real money can be used in the *Dota 2* Store to purchase, weapons, armour, hats, couriers, tournament items, etc.

NAG

The Order: 1886

In case you're concerned human history isn't wild enough

There's something intrinsically compelling about cleverly crafted alternate-history fiction. It provides a glimpse into another dimension of "what if?" scenarios, allowing us to view humanity's past through a kaleidoscope of possibilities. It lets us see what happens to the world when we spin the wheel in a different direction. That's the most fascinating aspect of *The Order: 1886*, the soon to be released PS4 exclusive that's set in Victorian-era London and flips our notion of history upside-down.

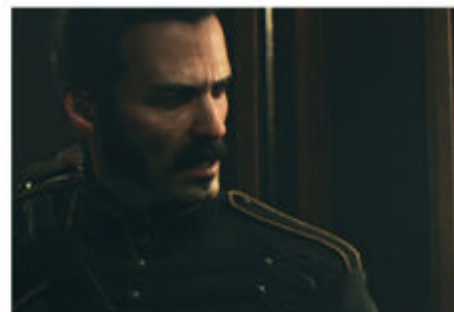
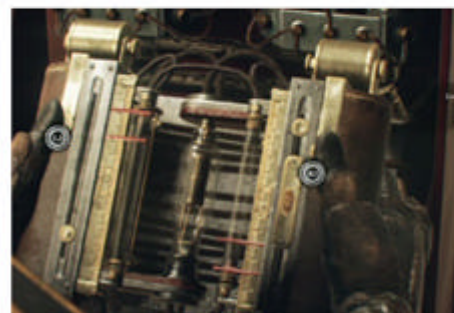
The story goes something like this: many centuries ago, a small group of humans are transformed into Half-breeds – half-human, half-beast with more than a passing resemblance to werewolves. War breaks out between humans and this new threat, and for the next few centuries the Half-breeds dominate the conflict, despite the humans vastly outnumbering them. The balance of

power swings in humanity's favour when King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table appear, calling themselves The Order and assembling the greatest warriors, tacticians and scientists of the time to push back against the Half-breeds – but even they are incapable of turning the tide completely, and it becomes obvious that it's only a matter of time before the knights would be thwarted. Fortune shines on The Order when they discover an elixir called Blackwater, which grants the knights increased strength, enhanced healing capabilities and supernaturally long life. Knights could still perish, however, and upon their death they would pass on their name to a worthy successor.

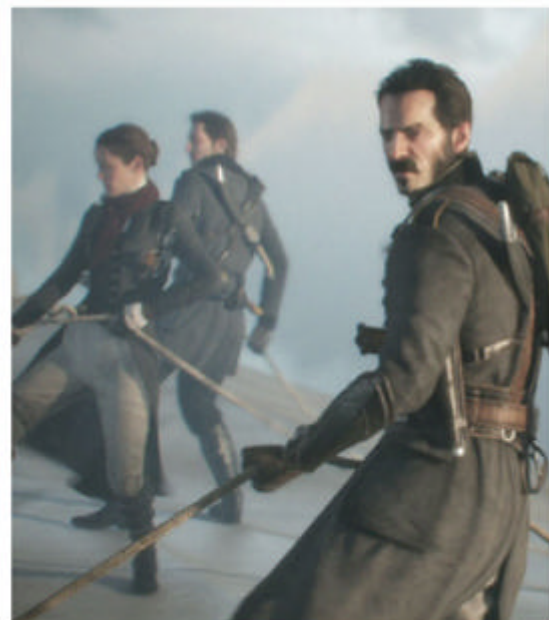
By the 18th century, after the rapid progress stimulated by the Industrial Revolution, a barrage of new technology and supremely lethal weaponry finally allows the humans to gain the upper hand in the war with the Half-

breeds. The population of London has grown steadily, bolstered by the promise of safety delivered by a fresh array of protective technologies. Naturally, the relative peace gives rise to new problems – the poor are still largely

“The visuals are outstanding, with a range of eye-catching effects and incredibly detailed animations...”



❶ The story will feature a number of prominent historical figures – like Nikola Tesla, who is seemingly a significant contributor to the technological wizardry abound in *The Order*.



RELEASE DATE / February 2015

PLATFORM / PS4

GENRE / Third-person shooter

DEVELOPER / Ready at Dawn / SCE Santa Monica Studio

PUBLISHER / readyatdawn.com

WEBSITE / Sony Computer Entertainment

at the mercy of Half-breed attacks, while the wealthy elite swell in their opulence, always protected by the watchful eye of The Order. Rebellion ensues, and it's not long before rumours arise that the rebels have allied themselves with the Half-breeds. Thus, the stage is set for *The Order: 1886*.

After spending some time with a very brief pre-release demo for *The Order*, its most striking feature is the universe it inhabits, and the lore on which it's built. Weaving in and out of history at will, it presents an incredibly attractive steampunk-ish aesthetic, a mix of Victorian pomp and highly advanced technology. The demo starts off with a raid on a zeppelin, wherein you and three of your Order allies rappel your way onto the airship mid-flight. The visuals are outstanding, with a range of eye-catching effects and incredibly detailed animations ensuring that there's never a lack of things to gawk at. There's an overall sense of exceptional production quality throughout the demo, and even in its early state the music and voice acting are excellent. It's also very clear from the camerawork and pacing of the demo that Ready at Dawn are finding loads of inspiration in film.

You're cast as Grayson, a knight of *The Order* and the third to bear the title of Sir Galahad. The demo doesn't show off much of his character at all, but it does showcase a slice of the gameplay variety on offer in *The Order*. Some areas require careful stealth and the use of a stash of curious gadgets (like a very fancy lockpick, and a device which seems to overload circuitry) to traverse safely. Stealthily disposing of foes is done in a very cool, very cinematic fashion: when you sneak up behind enemies, Grayson will reach for his knife and you have to time a button press with an on-screen indicator in order to successfully



❶ The game features horrible *Evil Within*-style letterbox borders that cut off a substantial chunk of screen space at the top and bottom edges. I'm sure the developers are convinced this is awesomely theatrical, but I really hope they remove it before release.

eliminate your target. If you fail, you'll alert the enemy and be rewarded with instant death. It's very gimmicky, but it does add an extra layer of complexity to sneaking up on unsuspecting guards. Gadgets like lockpicks, meanwhile, require the completion of simplistic mini-games to ensure their success. There's a super-slick object inspection view, which lets you pick up objects in the game world and move Grayson's hands using the analogue sticks to get a better look at them from every angle.

When battles break out, it's everything you'd expect from a cover-based third-person shooter. The action is beefy and the weapons pack a satisfying clout, with some of them offering secondary fire modes – there's an automatic rifle which fires a blast of air to knock back enemies, for example. There's apparently far more exotic weaponry on offer in the game as well, but none of it was available in the demo. Expect lightning guns and other such wonders to join the arsenal of more traditional firearms. I didn't get a chance to fight any Half-breeds, but the human enemies are interesting enough and come in different flavours, like riflemen and shotgunners.

Everything about *The Order* feels solid and well made, but I couldn't shake concerns that Ready at Dawn is a tad too obsessed with cinematic pursuits. It often wrestles control from you, not just during cut-scenes and the like, but during general gameplay as well. Traversing the frame of the zeppelin at the start of the demo, your actions are relegated to single button presses and quick flicks of the analogue sticks to get Grayson moving along a predetermined path. Every movement is deliberately animated, which means it looks great, but the stop-start motion feels jarring. Elsewhere, the game constantly dictates when you crouch, when you stand, how fast you can (or can't) move – it feels very controlled, very sterile.

Quick-time events pop up occasionally (like during close-quarter scuffles), and during these events time will sporadically slow to give you a chance to scan the environment for something to use to overcome enemies. The transitions and flow of the camera is extraordinary, but it often feels too much like you're watching the game rather than playing it. That said, the demo is so short that it's difficult to tell if the entire game will share similar tendencies, or if it's specific to the level to which I was confined. Either way, I'm excited to see more of *The Order*. The setting and narrative are endlessly fascinating, and I'm eager to dive into the rest of it. **NAG**

-Barkskin



Reviews *Intro*

We all have our flaws, some of us... more than others. And if adversity makes us stronger, the NAG team must be nearing super-human levels of strength by now. We're thinking of starting a special school for gifted youngsters; there might be a Kickstarter campaign in the near future. Until then, meet your reviewers...

Question / What's your gaming guilty pleasure?



CHRIS "SAVAGE" SAVIDES
Not choosing a gun slot in CoD and running around knifing people while cloaked. Good times.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare, StarCraft II



DANE "BARKSKIN" REMENDES
In every game I play, no matter how terrible, I spend obscene amounts of time scouring the environment for secrets and collectible doohickies. I hate that I do it, but I can't help myself. I MUST SEE EVERYTHING.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor, StarCraft II, Enslaved: Odyssey to the West



DELANO "DELANO" CUZZUCOLI
Key-hunting and maze navigation. Y'know, like in the early days of Apogee and id Software games. Yeh, I dig that. Bite me.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Kairo



GEOFF "GEOMETRIX" BURROWS
Game soundtracks. I have many that I listen to as often as "normal" music, and plenty of them for games that I've never even played. I try to sneak them onto party playlists, which usually leads to a lot of curious looks.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Police Quest Collection, Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare, StarCraft II



MATT "SAND_STORM" FICK
Watching Let's Plays on YouTube for way too long. My family just doesn't understand.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Dragon Age: Inquisition, DuckTales: Remastered (a whoo-hoo!)

mini review

Farming Simulator 15

fair warning: a large part of playing *Farming Simulator 15* involves defending it, because at first glance it seems like only a game that YouTubers would play while screaming at it. But it's a surprising title because it actually makes farming seem fun.

Farm Simulator 15 sees you running a farm (of course). You start off with a few fields, some shiny tractors, and a world of room for expansion. It lets you freely decide how best to plough ahead and gives you different fields of agriculture to invest in. One problem with this is that the game feels like a serious grind. You start being able to cultivate grains and chickens, but industries like forestry, dairy, and potatoes all require massive investments of money. Then again, that's probably realistic.

The game also has a poor



balance of activities. Either you're spending your time doing boring work (ploughing, urgh!), or you've hired a worker for the boring jobs and are now staring at your canola and willing it to grow faster.



But if that doesn't bug you, then this is a fun game. It's calming, low stress, surprisingly pretty, and supported by a healthy modding and multiplayer community. **NAG**
- Sand_Storm

82

It's a high-thresher job that you'll barley survive, but if you plough ahead you'll reap the rewards.

HEARD AT THE OFFICE...

“Believe me, you have to lie to your kids.”

Cheryl



MICHAEL “REDTIDE” JAMES
Searching every inch of the game world for secrets and hidden things (only some games).

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Elite Dangerous, Terraria, Diablo III, Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare



MIKLOS “MIKITO707” SZECSEI
Guitar Hero. Band Hero. Rock Band. I still play them. I still love them. I still mourn the death of the genre. :(

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Far Cry 4 and Dragon Age: Inquisition



MIKTAR “MIKTAR” DRACON
Playing games that have no artificial progression systems: no XP bars to fill, no stuff to unlock.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Final Fantasy XIV, Warframe, Diablo III, Guild Wars 2



SARAH “BELLUM” BROWNE
Pokémon. All of them. Always.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Diablo III, Dragon Age: Inquisition



TARRYN “AZIMUTH” VAN DER BYL
Call of Duty. Yes, it's the same thing every year with better graphics (maybe) and less content (probably), but I like that kind of consistency.

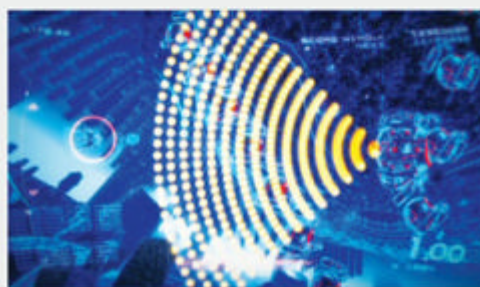
CURRENTLY PLAYING
Destiny, Destiny, Destiny. SOMEBODY SEND HELP.

▶ *mini review*

Revolver 360 RE:ACTOR

One of the things that has always bugged me about 2D shooters is the fact that, logically, the player's ship should be able to dodge enemy bullets in six degrees, especially if flight and zero-gravity circumstances are concerned. Hardware limitations aside, it took a long time for developers to latch onto the idea of a shmup with truly tiltable axes, but thankfully the concept has seen the light of day in the form of *Revolver 360 RE:ACTOR*.

This whimsically-titled game – in which a controller is almost mandatory – sees you navigating a ship in a cylindrical playing field. Enemies come from all sides and all angles, and players can rotate their perspective in order to fly under a wall of bullets or line up enemies for a perfect, all-encompassing shot. Also, different pathways will be available depending on your view, so thinking in three-



dimensional terms is essential for survival and bragging rights.

It's quite a hard little beast too, but the vibrant, neon visuals, killer upbeat electronic soundtrack and undeniable “just-one-more-try” quality will keep you returning for more punishment.



It's well-executed and it definitely deserves a lot more attention. If you're a fan of *Ikaruga* and you feel like you haven't had the same challenge in a very long time, you need to get this as soon as possible. **NAG**

- Delano

89

Quite literally a new twist on the shooter formula. Ikaruga's blue, cylindrical cousin.





NAG POSTER #2 / LEFT 4 DEAD

PLATFORMS / PC / PS4 / XBO

REVIEWED ON / PS4

GENRE / Action adventure

DEVELOPER / Ubisoft

AGE RATING / 18

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > 4 players

PUBLISHER / Ubisoft

WEBSITE / www.assassinscreed.ubi.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom

Assassin's Creed Unity

The annualised series takes another stumble

assassin's *Creed Unity* launched as a total mess. Four patches later and the game still isn't as stable as it should be. It's safe to say that for Ubisoft and their most valuable IP, *Assassin's Creed Unity* is a very poor first showing on a new generation of hardware.

You play Arno Dorian, a cocky and forgettable protagonist who loses his family at an early age and is raised by the de la Serre family instead. Unbeknown to young Arno, the de la Serre family is up to their eyeballs in Templar affairs, with Francois de la Serre (Arno's substitute father) being a Grand Master of the Templar order. Arno's actual father was an Assassin; you'd think Ubisoft's writers would lunge at the chance for some heavy themes with Arno having to choose between being loyal to his Assassin family, or loyal to his Templar family who, ostensibly, raised him anyway. Sadly there is no deep character story here. Instead, Arno and Elise (the daughter of Francois de la Serre) embark on a revenge mission after Francois is murdered. This all takes place against the backdrop of the

French Revolution, so expect characters like Napoleon and the Marquis de Sade to crop up at times throughout the plot. There are some rather good performances from voice and mo-cap actors, with de Sade and Elise being particularly well done. In fact, Elise is by far the most memorable character in the game (which isn't saying much, to be honest), which begs the question why Ubisoft didn't make her the playable protagonist instead of dull old Arno. It certainly would have made for a more memorable entry into the series.

Dull story and characters aside, *Assassin's Creed Unity* remains a troubling experience for many of the same reasons previous *Assassin's Creed* titles have. Controls are still erratic with your parkour-happy protagonist leaping on top of objects when you don't want him to. The recent *Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor* was accused of cribbing its free-running control scheme from *Assassin's Creed*, but ended up making a better one anyway – *Unity* now highlights that fact.

The introduction of a dedicated stealth stance should have been something rather

CAN'T WE ALL JUST GET ALONG?

The biggest addition in *Assassin's Creed Unity* is the drop-in-drop-out co-op multiplayer. At times, a shadowy assassin will literally materialise in front of you to recruit you into somebody else's co-op mission. If you accept you're whisked away and plonked into a game with other players. It works rather well, until you try to air-assassinate a target and end up clipping through a merchant shop and getting stuck, resulting in all four of you failing the mission. You know what's even more embarrassing than failing a mission due to a gameplay bug? Failing a mission due to a gameplay bug while three complete strangers look on and suffer the consequences.

The good news is that the collection of co-op missions can actually be played solo, so if you're averse to playing with other people, you can still experience those missions on your ace. That being said, there really is quite a bit of fun to be had playing through co-op missions with friends.



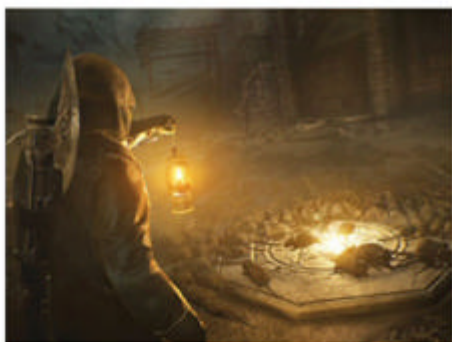
Modern day elements are clever, with "you" playing on an Abstergo developed home gaming console called the Helix System, "where the past is your playground".



game-changing, but instead the cover system is overly capricious and very sticky. What makes this more frustrating is the abundance of missions that rely on the new stealth approach; had the stealth mechanic been reliable and 100% functional, this wouldn't be an issue, but being given tetchy tools to complete a job does not make for a compelling experience.

Likewise, Ubisoft has tried to make the combat more interesting by adding difficulty levels to the various map regions and the enemies found within. This does little more than make the highest difficulty enemies cause massive damage and prove near impossible to parry. Yes, the "parry-counter-attack" mechanic remains, which at least makes the combat familiar. However, the added difficulty levels make large-scale encounters with high-level enemies incredibly infuriating, which forces you to fall back on either spamming health potions throughout fights, or trying your luck with the aforementioned shoddy stealth system.

Sticking with broken systems, smoke bombs are now largely useless during fights, because there's no way to equip your hidden blade to assassinate groups of enemies



mid-fight. The new hidden blade (called the "Phantom Blade") also comes with a mini crossbow. That mini crossbow is erratic insofar as stealth is concerned, as it has a tendency to alert all nearby guards the moment you try to shoot somebody. It's done a good job of removing the "hidden" part of hidden blade.

My biggest gripe with *Unity* is Ubisoft's insistence on shoehorning as many cross-platform and social networking link-ups as possible. There are yellow chests to unlock in the game, but you can't do that without setting up an Initiates profile to track your *Assassin's Creed* progression for... who knows what reason. There are also blue chests to unlock, but you can't unless you play silly mini games on the *Assassin's Creed Unity* companion app. This forced interconnectivity utterly demolishes any semblance of immersion the game can conjure, as obnoxious pop-ups constantly remind you to create and link online accounts in order to fully experience *Unity*. What's more, the built-in microtransactions mean you can spend literally hundreds of extra rands to unlock swords, hoods, pants and more. Then there are the heaps of equipment that remain locked away behind upcoming DLC releases, but are still dangled in front of you in the equipment lists. It all

seems like a vulgar attempt to get you to part with even more money.

Unity is not all terrible, and it indeed has some considerable redeeming qualities that make the myriad downfalls all the more frustrating. For a start, the Paris that Ubisoft has created is unreservedly gorgeous. The level of detail that can be found in the streets of the city is awe-inspiring. You'll come across butchers, carriage makers, blacksmiths (making guillotine blades!), tailors and more all performing their duties throughout the city. Their actions are meticulously detailed; their shops even more so. Ubisoft has crafted one of the most believable gaming environments I've come across in years, and for that they need to be applauded. What's more, the level of detail on the historical buildings, like Notre Dame, is superb with a one-to-one scale. Stained-glass windows distort outside scenes and cast colourful patterns on interior floors and walls; puddles of mud and slush run through the streets of the poorer districts; vineyards and farms dominate the more rustic outskirts of the city; it's all superbly realised and wonderful to play inside. Further adding to the believability of the environments is the fact that the vast majority of buildings have interiors as well; there are no loading screens



Ubisoft has added a downwards parkour move, which means getting down from buildings is much easier. It works very well and needs to be a series feature moving forward.



as you move from the streets to indoors, which obviously makes for some more interesting chase sequences.

Ubisoft has also *finally* given us the seamless transitions from in-engine cut-scenes to gameplay. This was promised all the way back with *Assassin's Creed III*, but never materialised until now. It's a little thing, but it's effective in keeping you in the game world.

Assassination missions have become much more free-form, with numerous approaches, entrances and potentials to cause distractions so that you can slip in to reach your target. Being faced with a new assassination mission, with its numerous potential methods, is often an exciting prospect. Outside of the story missions there is an almost overwhelming amount of extra content to play. There's enough to keep you busy for dozens and dozens of hours, especially if you're a completionist.

Perhaps the most telling comment to be made about *Assassin's Creed Unity* is the fact that Elise's hair is the thing that stood out the most for me. About half-way through gushing to a friend about how realistic Elise's hair looks, I realised that the thing that had elicited the biggest response from me regarding *Unity* also happened to be one of the most

mundane: an NPC's hair model. It was a sobering realisation that I have all but grown exhausted with this franchise and Ubisoft's insistence to create perpetual releases with minute changes year-on-year. **NAG**

- Mikito707

60

The Assassin's Creed franchise deserves better than this. Fans of the franchise deserve better than this.

Unity is an inconsistent experience from start to finish as it tries to be too much at once. There is a lot of potential to be found peeping our from between the dozens of cracks, but should we accept that by this stage in the IP's lifespan? I'm inclined to say "no".

PLUS / Tons of extra missions / Incredibly detailed Paris / Co-op / New downwards parkour works

MINUS / Weak protagonist / **Very** buggy despite patches / Persistent frame-rate dips / Forced cross-platform functionality

PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / PSV / XBO

REVIEWED ON / PS4

AGE RATING / 3

GENRE / Sports

MULTIPLAYER / Local > 4 players Online > None

WEBSITE / www.rugby-thegame.com

DEVELOPER / HB Studios

PUBLISHER / Big Ben Interactive

DISTRIBUTOR / Apex Interactive

Rugby 15

Better ruck next time

i pity the fool who tries to make a rugby game. It's a sport filled with complicated rules and nuances. How do you incorporate things like knock-ons with believable AI? How do you keep a ruck dynamic while worrying about what the guy with the controller is actually doing to make it happen? The answer seems to be: "you don't".

Since HB Studios' last attempt with *Rugby World Cup 2011*, things have been all quiet on the rugby videogames front. Now that the next World Cup is around the corner, it seems that they're giving this cash cow another milking. The problem is: they're trying to milk some bull. Had they maybe taken a bit more time to iron out some of the seriously buggy bits and put even a smidgeon of effort into reflecting the spirit of the game, they may have presented a decent game. As it stands, they haven't.

Apart from the unrealistic gameplay and clunky AI, licensing is an issue. They have some: Top 14, Pro D2, Aviva Premiership and Pro12. But for the big rugby nations like South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, these may as well read "Splurgle 17, Plerp B4, Avira Antivirus, and Flarg11". Knowing that the Brits can play Exeter Chiefs vs. London Wasps while you play Durban 86 (Sharks) vs. Pretoria 79 (Bulls) kind of leaves a sour taste in your mouth. **NAG**

- **Bellum**



CHOOSE ORIGINAL GAMES



DON'T PIRATE GAMES IT'S A CRIME AND IT KILLS OUR INDUSTRY

By supporting piracy you
support organised crime

38

It's like someone described rugby to the developers with doodles on a napkin after a few beers, told the intern to find licensing for the teams and players, and moved everyone's final deadline up by six months with a week's notice.

PLUS / At least it's a start? / The controls are simple enough

MINUS / Outdated physics and AI / It's too damn clean to be rugby / Weak visual design



Southern African Federation
Against Copyright Theft

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PLATFORMS / PS3 / PS4

REVIEWED ON / PS4

GENRE / Puzzle / platformer

DEVELOPER / Sumo Digital

AGE RATING / 7

MULTIPLAYER / Local > 4 Players Online > 4 Players

PUBLISHER / SCEE

WEBSITE / littlebigplanet.playstation.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Ster Kinekor Entertainment

LittleBigPlanet 3

Fun for a while

this intro went through many false-starts because it's difficult to fully express an opinion for this game. It's a game that really tries hard and is full of creativity, but at the same time has some let-downs. Did I just give away the entire review in the opening paragraph? Damn, my parents always warned me about doing that.

Anyway, *LittleBigPlanet 3* is the next in Sony's flagship "platform for making games" series. As such, the game is basically split in two: playing it, and a robust creative mode.

PLAYING A GAME

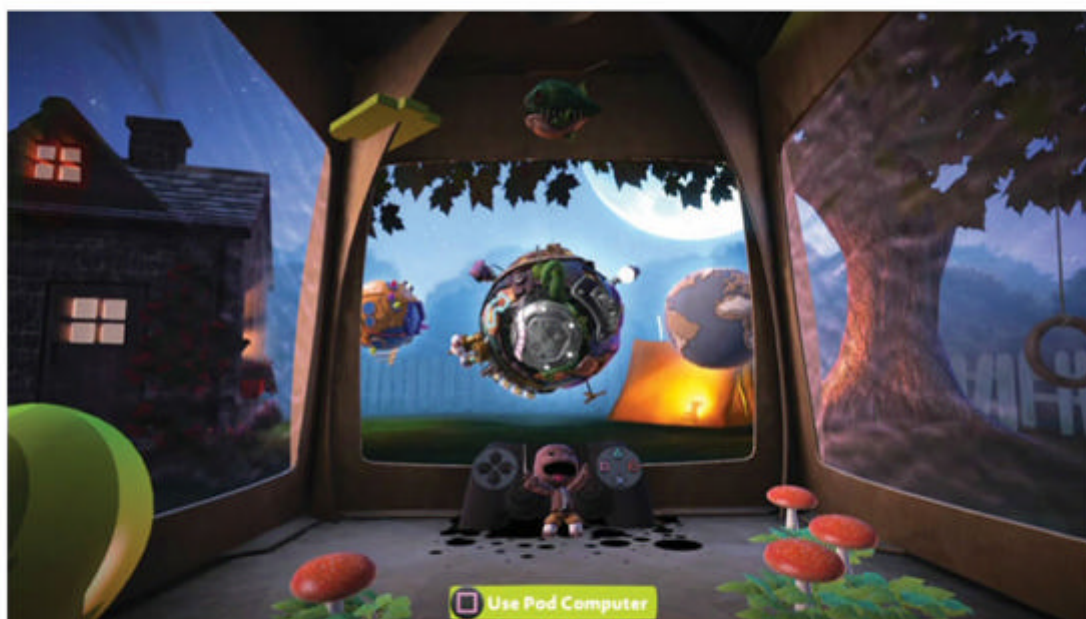
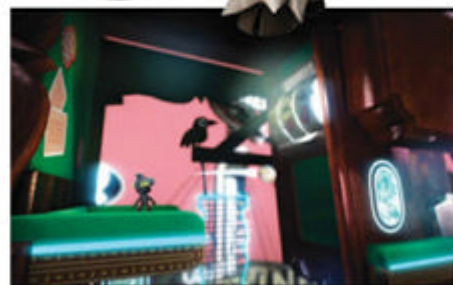
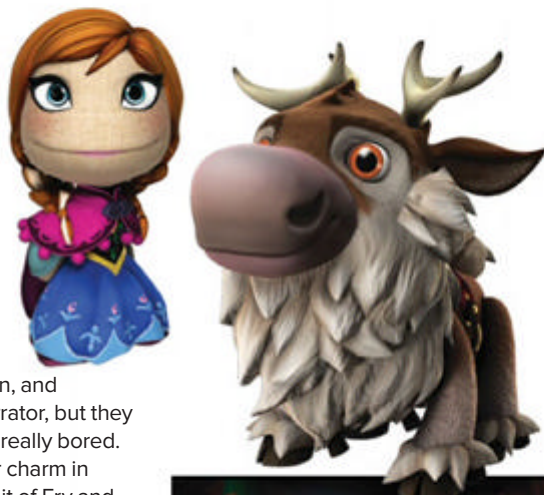
Unfortunately, despite a healthy dose of creativity throughout, the story mode of *LBP3* is largely forgettable. The now iconic Sackboy is whisked away to a planet called Bunkum by the obviously villainous Newton. There, Sackboy accidentally releases some Titans, and our woolly hero must recruit three legendary heroes to sort out the whole mess.

The story isn't very good, and this isn't helped by the voice-acting. NPCs throughout the story are fully voiced (a first for the series),

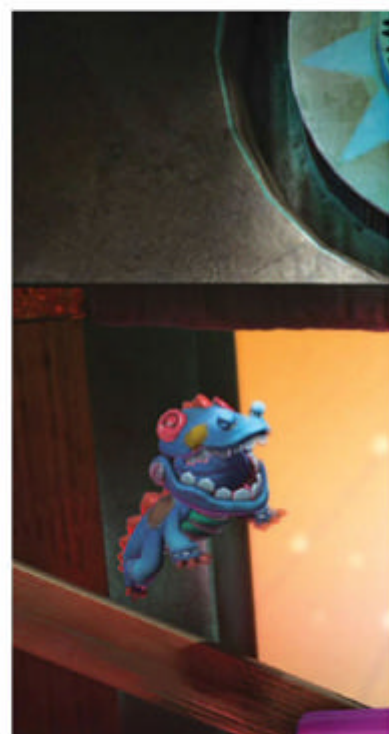
including Hugh Laurie as Newton, and Stephen Fry returning as the narrator, but they all deliver their lines as if they're really bored. There's very little wit, humour, or charm in the voice work, and not even a bit of Fry and Laurie can save that. Another unfortunate aspect of the story is that it's clearly aimed at children. The story feels immature, the dialogue is simple, and the narrator uses some silly words in a failed attempt at whimsy.

Gameplay-wise, the controls feel strange and imprecise. Your characters always feel just a little too light, and platforming is sluggish. This lets down the level design, which is usually amazingly creative. Most levels will leave you in awe of just how much work went into it, and will really inspire you to create your own. The music complements the game well too, and is quite atmospheric.

One of the most-hyped features of *LBP3* is the addition of multiple playable characters. They add a new depth to the levels, encouraging more exploration and new traversal options. This of course carries over to the Create Mode too, and you can tailor-make

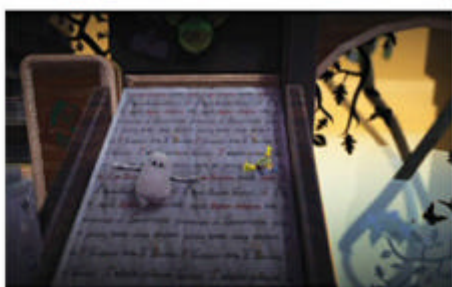


This is your pod, because "main menu" screens are for the weak.



levels around specific character abilities. To compensate for these new abilities, Sackboy can now use multiple gadgets, including grappling hook hats and a knock-off Portal Gun. Each of our main characters looks like something your grandmother knitted for you when you were young. So in other words: charming and cute enough to make a baby unicorn vomit rainbows.

In addition to the campaign, *LBP3* offers massive amounts of community-made levels. These give the game value, and the longevity offered by them will keep you playing long after the storyline is finished. There's a lot on offer here: mini-golf, top-down shooters, platformers, and even a surprisingly creepy *Dead Space* homage. One negative aspect is that the community levels often suffer frame-rate dips. These are a bit jarring, but don't last long.



MAKING A GAME

Actual gameplay is really only half of the *LBP* series. The other half is the robust Create Mode. For this game, even more options have been added that will ensure you can pretty much make anything your heart desires, from *Mario* clones to phallus cannons.

There are more than 100 tutorials available, so you can be assured that every aspect will be covered. The more essential tutorials are playable, and form a collection of puzzle-based levels. Each level teaches you how to create, tweak, and manipulate a creative tool, and these do a good job of showing you the basics of what you have to work with. Unfortunately, each level only focuses on a single tool, and there's nothing that teaches you how to work with everything at your disposal. Players will probably be quite overwhelmed the first time they try making something.

The level designer isn't without its faults either. The editing menu is poorly designed and hides anything you might need under several submenus and sections. Editing items that you put down also means you need to go into a different menu to find the selection tool to tweak the thing you want to edit. Like I said, poorly designed.

The camera control is also awful. It's understandable that you won't need much control for the playable sections, but it's infuriating to not be able to pan up and down to study your creations in closer detail.

Other than that, the level editor is certainly robust and includes options for everything

from physics to AI scripting. If you're not a creative type, it's best to steer clear of this and just play the community levels. But if you have a good vision and know your way around the systems, then you'll find limitless options here.

PLAY, CREATE, SHARE

Despite some negativity, I couldn't help but like *LittleBigPlanet 3*. If you can block out the poor voice-acting and childish storyline, and come to grips with the floaty controls, then you'll find a lot to enjoy with the single-player's extremely creative levels. Besides that, the depth of the creative mode and the sheer amount of community levels will give you plenty of reason to keep coming back for years. **NAG**

- Sand_Storm

70 This is the type of game where one or two things are pretty damn bad. They are a let-down, but don't ruin the game. Plough through the story for collectables, then forget it and enjoy all the community levels.

PLUS / Creative levels / Cute characters / Bazillions of levels / Deep level creator

MINUS / Weak and childish story / Imprecise controls / Lacklustre voice-acting

PLATFORMS / PC / PS4 / XBO

REVIEWED ON / PS4

GENRE / Racing

DEVELOPER / Ivory Tower

AGE RATING / 12

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > 8 players

PUBLISHER / Ubisoft

WEBSITE / www.thecrew-game.ubi.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom

The Crew

Have you got your 5-10 tats yet?

At *The Crew's* E3 2013 announcement, jaws dropped at the mere thought that Ubisoft was developing a racing game. The tingles people got from the reveal trailer continued into the public alphas and betas and it largely survived public scrutiny.

As Alex Taylor (voiced by Troy Baker), you are contracted out of prison to work for the FBI to take down a rogue senior official as well as avenge the murder of your brother, Dayton. With a sizeable cast of supporting characters, players spend about 20 hours in the main campaign working to increase the reach of the "5-10" gang across America and assist the FBI.

During the game you make your way across a scale version of continental USA. The game world is so large and seamless and extravagant that it takes players over 30 minutes to travel from one side to the other.

My trip from New York to Los Angeles covered 103km, during which I drove through desert landscapes, dense forests and treacherous snow-capped mountains. I drew immense joy from crashing and watching my car slowly repair itself as I drove on.

Billed as an MMO, *The Crew* only allows eight players per session but there's still room for player interaction and impromptu drag races. Players can form four-person crews to complete missions and almost the entire campaign together. *The Crew* is online-only so don't play this on an unstable connection.

Things get more nuanced once you unlock all the tuner types (Street, Dirt, Perf, Circuit, Raid), allowing you to join factions online. Factions vie for control of regions in the game every month and are rewarded by unlocking special faction missions and challenges,



Troy Baker as Alex Taylor, looking like a hipster-ish Joel from *The Last of Us*.



Exploring and cruising with friends is part of *The Crew's* charm.

giving players huge amounts of credits and XP. Faction missions make the main campaign necessary up to a point, but you can safely ignore it, plot holes and all, once all five factions are available.

Though it is a decent romp, several design choices are annoying. Police cars act like they weigh 10 tons and have unlimited nitrous. The AI-controlled vehicles magically warp around one another despite obvious clipping, sometimes going through them. The story is forgettable and Alex is always reacting to, never instigating, plot twists. There are also microtransactions, but only for cars and cosmetic improvements, both of which can be earned on merit.

But by far the biggest issue is that for a driving game, the fun of driving needs to be there from the start but here you have to slog for two hours before the feeling takes hold. Ivory Tower has created an enjoyable open-world racer, but it needs more soul available at the beginning.

NAG
-Cataclysm_ZA



79 The long lead time before it gets really fun, the glitchy police and AI issues will ward off impatient players, but it is worth sticking through it to join a Faction. *The Crew* is an ambitious title for Ubisoft and it largely delivers on its promises.

PLUS / Huge, seamless world / Factions keep the community involved / Upgrades earned on merit / Bonneville Salt Flats International Speedway

MINUS / Online-only / Several graphical shortcuts taken / Occasionally glitchy car physics / Uplay tie-ins, yay!

IGN[®]

F I R S T

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#1 VIDEO GAME ENTERTAINMENT SITE IN THE WORLD

PLATFORMS / PS3 / PS4

REVIEWED ON / PS4

GENRE / Party game

DEVELOPER / London Studio

AGE RATING / 12

MULTIPLAYER / Local > 2 players Online > None

PUBLISHER / SCEE

WEBSITE / www.singstar.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Ster Kinekor Entertainment

Singstar Ultimate Party

Singing in the pain

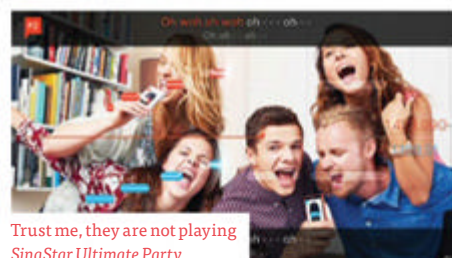
The concept of connecting an app to your game is nothing new, so it came as no surprise when London Studio designed the latest *SingStar Ultimate Party* around a dedicated mic app. Unfortunately, this, along with a lack of game modes, make the latest instalment in the *SingStar* series a sad step in the wrong direction.

Even with 30 tracks to choose from, *SingStar Ultimate Party* lacks variety. Sure, you can attempt to sing hits like *Happy* by Pharrel Williams, or *No Scrubs* by TLC, but anyone looking to rap along to Drake will have to find an alternative method to polish their skills. The library has some great pop hits from the '80s up to now, but overall its focus is on the typical pop songs that you would expect in a game like this.

SingStar Ultimate party includes the

SingStar online store where you can purchase and download new music to sing along to; the store is packed full of songs from every genre, and more are added every week. The problem arises here: those of you who have been fans of the series will be heartbroken to know that you cannot swap your previous discs while in the game to sing along to those songs included in your PS3 or PS2 versions of the game. This basically means that if you owned any other version of the game, then you might as well throw those old discs in the trash.

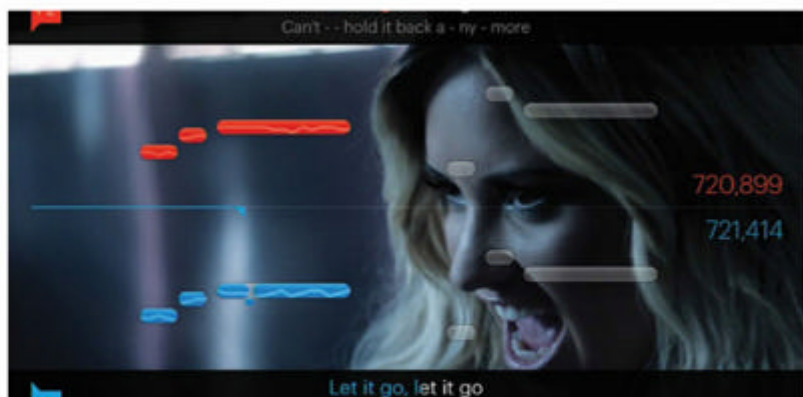
Everything that made a party with *SingStar* great has also been tossed alongside your massive collection. Gone is *Pass the Mic*, Duets, Medleys, and even the difficulty adjustments. This has all been replaced with a standard 2-player sing-along mode which



Trust me, they are not playing *SingStar Ultimate Party*.



No cheesy party game is complete without a cliché track listing.



lacks variety and excitement. All you do now is sing along with a friend and move on, there is very little reason to keep going.

The game allows you to use your phone as a microphone courtesy of a downloadable app. This might seem like a blessing but it is actually a step back from the clunky microphones that were included in previous games. Your smartphone feels out of place in your hands, especially when you are using a larger one like an iPhone 6 Plus or a Samsung Galaxy Note 4. Size aside, the app has problems of its own; I encountered issues like a buzzing sound when using certain smartphones, and I was often forced to use a friend's phone because my app was acting up. The whole situation dragged the party down, and if a party game cannot fulfil its purpose then what is the point? **NAG**

-Coco

40

SingStar Ultimate Party is a step back in the series, lacking everything that made it a great party starter.

PLUS / Good library for pop fans / Menu design is pretty

MINUS / Lacking game modes / Mic app is terrible No backwards compatibility

Geometry Wars 3: Dimensions

A rather shapely 2D shmup

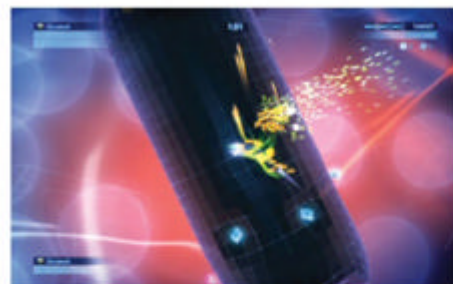
For the most part, gamers don't care for scores. It's largely seen as a frivolous relic from the early arcade era, but occasionally a game comes along that actually places tangible value in those elusive numbers, and *Geometry Wars 3: Dimensions* is a prime example.

Like its predecessors, the game is a simplistic twin-stick shooter affair that is very easy to pick up yet quite the beast to master. Players take control of a basic craft that can move in all directions on a flat plain and fire in four directions independent to its movement. Your targets are similarly basic shapes that appear in great numbers and either pursue you, fire upon you or just get in your way. The required skill lies not just in effectively dodging and firing upon your enemies, but in pulling off elaborate kill streaks and rapidly picking up diamond-shaped debris the bad

guys leave behind.

Although 2D, it makes use of clever pseudo-3D tricks in order to keep gameplay interesting and fresh. Levels twist and turn into assorted shapes (from flat disks to cylinders to spheres) which entails quick thinking about the exact location of enemies and the proper path upon which to concentrate fire. The cylinder levels, for example, amount to a drastically reduced field of vision and will require rather snappy reflexes – something already in high demand in this game. Not only is it challenging, but it's visually appealing to boot, and invokes feelings of old arcade games if they were on a sugar rush.

The game features a massive slew of levels, and unlocking said levels requires the aforementioned high scores. The initial dozen or so levels are pretty lenient with



their admission fees, but it won't be long before you'll need more brag-worthy points to your name in order to access the bosses. Defeating bosses also unlocks additional ships and abilities, such as mine-laying, so you'll want to trash these brutes in short order.

In addition to merely ploughing through the game's main campaign, you can also tackle things cooperatively with a mate or go full-on deathmatch with other players. As you would expect, these modes are confusing as all hell but also insanely fun. Players may also sign up to have their scores posted on an online leaderboard, and trust me, there's no better method of settling arguments and engaging in good, old-fashioned one-upmanship.

If you prefer the original, endless-style gameplay that featured on *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved*, there's a mode for that too. Perhaps the most baffling inclusion is a "pacifism" mode that takes away your weapons and has you racing through gates in order to elude enemies. Huh? Stick to shooting, please!

Geometry Wars 3: Dimensions is a must for fans of the series and truly one of the seminal titles in the shmup genre.

- Delano



87

The definitive not-quite-3D twin-stick shoot-'em-up.

PLUS / Addictive and frantic shoot-'em-up action / Simple-yet-amazing neon-style graphics

MINUS / High difficulty can be off-putting / 3D gimmicks can cause confusion

stasis

ALL BY MYSELF

RELEASE DATE /

Early Q2 2015

PLATFORM /

PC

GENRE /

Adventure / horror

DEVELOPER /

The Brotherhood

PUBLISHER /

The Brotherhood

WEBSITE /

www.stasisgame.com



Approximately 2.7 billion miles from Earth, the *Groomlake* cruises through the clouds of Neptune. All-but abandoned, the mammoth spaceship has seen more than its share of dark and crooked human experimentation – the sort of stuff that's kept off the books. In the vastness of space, there's no shortage of hiding places for the Cayne Corporation and its twisted purpose.

It's on the *Groomlake* where the story of *Stasis* takes place. John Maracheck awakens suddenly from his cryostasis chamber, severely injured and uncertain where he is or how he got there. The remaining stasis chambers are either empty or contain long-dead bodies. Last John remembers, he, his wife, and their young daughter were on their way to Titan – Saturn's largest moon – to start a new life. Now, nearly one billion miles off course, John has lost sight of both his future and his family. It'll be up to you to guide John through the *Groomlake*, find out what the hell is going on, and (hopefully) reunite him with his family.

Stasis is a point-and-click adventure game, but it has about as much in common with the likes of *Space Quest* and *Monkey Island* as it does with *Planescape: Torment...* and the film *Alien*. Perhaps the most significant difference between *Stasis* and other PnC adventures is the fixed isometric viewpoint – something synonymous with role-playing games but

extremely uncommon in this genre due to the separation it creates between player and the game world. But this detached point-of-view could be seen as a metaphor for the game as a whole: it's a project of contrasting factors: light and shadow, loneliness and family bonds, urgency and patience, film-like qualities in the

body of a video game.

But lying just beneath *Stasis*' gritty exterior is a classic sort of game. PnC adventures are renowned for the puzzle-solving abilities they demand of their players, and *Stasis* is no different. John will have to explore the *Groomlake*, slowly open up new areas of the ship, and deal with challenges along the way. These challenges come in many forms: some of them are typical logic puzzles, some will require the correct item (or combination of items), and others might rely purely on your ability to pay attention to a subtle hint or two. While John initially finds himself alone on the *Groomlake*, it soon becomes apparent that he's not the only person around, and it's not long after that he discovers not everyone who's left on the ship is there to make friends.

Building an adventure game like this is not without its own challenges, and creator Christopher Bischoff is keen to ensure that *Stasis* doesn't give in to the tropes of older games in the genre that punished players for not playing in some sort of magically prescribed way. You won't be able to screw yourself over by going somewhere you shouldn't be without having first picked up the Pegasus feather or whatever you'll need next (hint: it won't be a Pegasus feather). There's very little backtracking forced on the player, and, while death is always waiting around the corner with his finely-honed scythe, the game

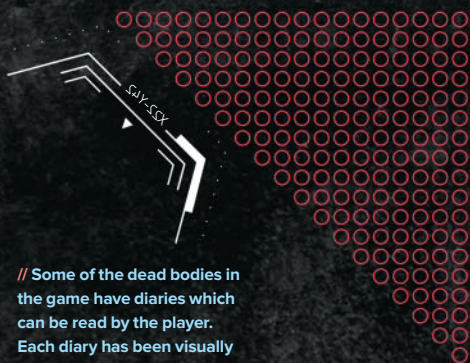
"*Stasis* is a game that's designed to tell a story like a film does, and because of that, it uses a lot of neat tricks throughout to draw in the player"



will handily autosave before you go and send John into a vat of flesh-melting acid or any of the other (many) ways he can die. And, thanks to the generosity of the game's Kickstarter backers, John will also be able to kill himself in a number of amusing (or, you know, disgusting) ways, courtesy of the rather interesting items he'll acquire over the course of the game. But character death isn't designed to penalise the player, only elaborate on the grimness of the setting in which John finds himself. As Christopher puts it, "the deaths aren't there to

piss people off. I want people to find them."

Stasis is a game that's designed to tell a story like a film does, and because of that, it uses a lot of neat tricks throughout to draw in the player and combat the (thankfully, gorgeous) isometric environment art. The most obvious, and this is hardly a trick, is that the characters in the game will grow and develop during the game in a manner far more pronounced than what's typical of classic adventure games. The voice acting is designed to reflect this as well; Christopher told us that he had the actors read every line of their scripts with four different emotional inflections so that he had ultimate control over the mood of the game at any one time. But perhaps the most "film-like" quality of *Stasis* is the attention to detail. Every little nuance is accounted for: every room in the ship makes architectural sense, everything has a function. All of the personnel (most of whom are dead) aboard the *Groomlake* are also clearly designed to create a sense of community and history: exploring this history and discovering the personal relationships, connections, and tasks that the people who now litter the halls



// Some of the dead bodies in the game have diaries which can be read by the player. Each diary has been visually customised to suit the history and nature of its owner.

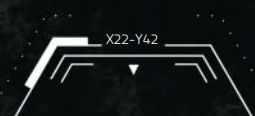


MUSIC FROM THE OLD-SCHOOL PROS

Two extremely talented musicians have jumped on-board to provide high-quality music for *Stasis*.

Mark Morgan is a world-renowned composer of video game, film, and TV music. He's best known for composing the soundtracks for classic games including *Descent*, *Giants: Citizen Kabuto*, *Fallout*, and *Planescape: Torment*, as well as the more recent *Wasteland 2* and *Torment: Tides of Numenera*. Mark is providing the core audio for the soundtrack, including the chilling lullaby theme that runs throughout the game.

Daniel Sadowski will be providing additional music for the game, suitable for more general-purpose background audio. His credits cover a number of films and TV shows, as well as games including *Counter-Strike: GO*, *Disciples 3*, *Stuntman: Ignition*, and *MAG*.





// The game's evil protagonist is called Dr. Malan. The developers felt that they couldn't possibly make a game without putting in at least one South African character.



TIMELINE OF EVENTS

2049 / The Eugenics War ends. Unapproved genetic modification is outlawed worldwide.

2050 / Cayne Mining Limited is founded by Hendry Cayne.

2077 / A treasure trove of illegal medical research is discovered a mile below Japan's surface. Cayne is appointed to review the cache and oversee its expropriation.

2077 / Cayne Mining Limited rebrands as Cayne Corporation.

2077-2100 / Cayne Corporation rises to become the most valuable mega-conglomerate on Earth.

2100 / Cayne Corporation launches the *Tower*, a 6,106-foot long nuclear fusion-powered space vessel to be used as a planetary mining platform.

2116 / After sustaining excessive damage caused by adverse atmospheric conditions, the *Tower* is decommissioned as a mining vessel and undergoes an overhaul, where it's retro-fitted to be a laboratory.

2120 / The *Tower* is rechristened the *Groomlake* and leaves dry dock. It begins its journey towards the outer-most planets in the solar system.

2148 / John Maracheck and his family leave Earth in search of a new life on Titan.

2151 / John wakes from cryostasis aboard the *Groomlake*, alone and on the verge of death.



The cylindrical hyperbaric chamber is welded shut, creating a metal tomb for anyone inside.

WHAT'S NEXT?

As *Stasis* draws to completion, Christopher and Nicholas are already thinking about their future plans in game development. The immediate task after *Stasis* will be the development of a short, standalone game that the brothers are calling *The Cayne Chapter* (we assume they'll come up with a catchier name by then), which will be a prequel to *Stasis* and is to be released entirely for free. *The Cayne Chapter* will detail some of the background goings-on behind the *Groomlake*, where it came from, and how it ended up as the setting for a horror adventure. As a separate story, players will be able to dig in without

the fear of spoiling the main game for themselves, but there will be connections between the two stories, adding bulk to the impressively large and well thought-out universe that ticks away under the hood of *Stasis*.

Once *Stasis* is entirely done, it's likely that The Brotherhood will begin work on smaller, more manageable projects, in the form of episodic games. Owing to Christopher's obsession with film, they say these short games will play out like episodes in a TV series, being self-contained but connected to a greater story arc.



in body bags had is all part of the experience. Even the soundtrack plays its role in telling a story: an eerie melody and whispering sound effects drift through the game, playing on John's sanity (and the player's), and connecting the player to the events that unfold before them.

What began as a passion project is growing into something truly impressive and of very high quality. *Stasis* is a game created almost entirely by one chap. Fitting, then, that it tells the story of a man lost inside the vastness of a giant spaceship, adrift in the outer reaches of our solar system. But there's far more to this game than the "really cool indie game developer story" that's behind it. *Stasis* is set to be a deep, emotion-fueled game that just so happens to be a killer throwback to both adventure games and science-fiction tales of days gone by. If you're a fan of any of those factors, then this is one to look out for.

"It'll be up to you to guide John through the *Groomlake*, find out what the hell is going on, and (hopefully) reunite him with his family."

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

By time *Stasis* launches later this year, it would have been in development for five years. During that time, the game's creator, Christopher Bischoff, has done nearly everything himself: programming, game design, visuals, writing, and even much of the audio. But since the game's successful Kickstarter campaign in 2013, Christopher was able to take on additional help in the departments in which he was less comfortable. A 3D designer by trade (he, his brother Nicholas, and Nicholas' wife Kristal run a successful 3D architectural visualisation studio in Johannesburg called Burn), Christopher thought it'd be a good idea to leave the music composition and voice acting to the professionals (although he does have a small voicing role in the game), as well as outsourcing some of the writing work, and all of the editing.

Since Christopher was able to move into full-time development of *Stasis* in January 2014, Nicholas stepped in to oversee financial and PR responsibilities, essentially handling all of the business stuff while Christopher focuses on the game creation.

// During development of the game, Christopher worked closely with the creators of Visionaire Studio, the game creation software in which *Stasis* is developed. New features and numerous tweaks were made thanks to input from The Brotherhood, including support for 16-directional characters.





// The Groomlake has been host to "fringe studies" on human subjects for some time. Where possible, it acquires new lab specimens by hijacking space vessels whose crew are sleeping soundly in cryostasis.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

The Brotherhood is very open about the software and services that they're using to develop *Stasis*. Since this is their first commercial game, they've made plentiful use of off-the-shelf software. If you're looking to create your own game (an adventure game or otherwise), then pay attention to this list; it could serve as a useful starting point:

3D GRAPHICS: Autodesk 3ds Max and Choasgroup VRAY

2D GRAPHICS: Corel Paintshop Pro and Adobe Photoshop

AUDIO: Audacity and Adobe Audition

COMPOSITION: Adobe After Effects and Sony Vegas

GAME ENGINE: Visionaire Studio Professional

CHARACTER ANIMATION AND RIGGING: Mixamo

CHARACTER MODELS: DAZ Studio

INTERVIEW

with creator Christopher Bischoff
and producer Nicholas Bischoff

NAG: *The subject matter in Stasis is pretty heavy, and you've said that your inspirations are dystopian science-fiction films. Why is the game so sombre?*

Nic: I think it's supposed to be quite realistic. We're not going the *Dead Space* way where the hero does his thing and saves the day and destroys the evil corporation. It's not like that. When we were writing the story we were constantly grounding ourselves: it's an ordinary man in an extraordinary situation. It wasn't that he was going to change the world; he was just trying to save himself and his family.

Chris: It's very difficult when writing a story: you tend to always go bigger. Like there'd be a part where he falls down and grabs a thing, but an ordinary guy wouldn't do that. If I fall three metres, I'm going to hurt myself, a lot. So we always try to go back to that simpler storytelling, and not open up the story too much; it's just him trying to find his family. The other stuff is happening around him but that's not the focus.

NAG: *Since all of your voice actors are remote, how did you ensure that they'd stay in-character as the story evolved?*

Nic: We wrote a treatment for the characters and when we briefed the voice artists we gave them a lot of information. Essentially we did a character arc, with a screenplay. So what we could have is something like "all dialogue here should be said with a sense of nervousness or in a whisper, as if talking to himself to feel less lonely as a coping mechanism." So we gave them a lot of prompts and the acting turned out brilliant. The arc could go something like "depressed, finds a friend, happier, all the way through to tragedy, to confidence".

Chris: And we try to motivate everything based on what's happened before. We did table readings here where we'd sit around and we'd play parts, read it together to make sure that it all makes sense.

Nic: We wrote it like a movie. That's Chris' passion – film – so it made sense to write it like that. So with the voice acting, we tried to treat it like a triple-A production. We wrote the entire screenplay and gave the whole

thing to every voice artist. We wanted them to understand where their character is coming from and going to. We had a lot of discussions with them about how they thought their character would feel at each point. They sent us two or three pages worth at a time, and we'd discuss what the next set would require.

Chris: Ideally you'd have all of those actors in a room together, but we couldn't do that. So we tried to replicate that. They'd give me content and I'd edit together all of the sequences so they could hear what it sounds like with the other actors involved.

NAG: *Was this the plan from the beginning, to have such a strong focus on storytelling?*

Chris: The earliest treatment of *Stasis* was about a salvager who comes across this ship and is essentially a grave-robber. The idea was that, after discovering what was on the ship, he'd turn around and become a good person. But a) I wasn't a skilled enough writer to be able to do that, and b) after a while that stuff just didn't interest me anymore. After the four-and-a-bit years that I've been working on *Stasis*, my personal views have changed drastically.

Nic: What we're trying to do is something more grounded to what we understand. We're a close family, we run a family business... they always say "write what you know". And it's difficult to write what you don't know; we're not in space, we're not junkers.

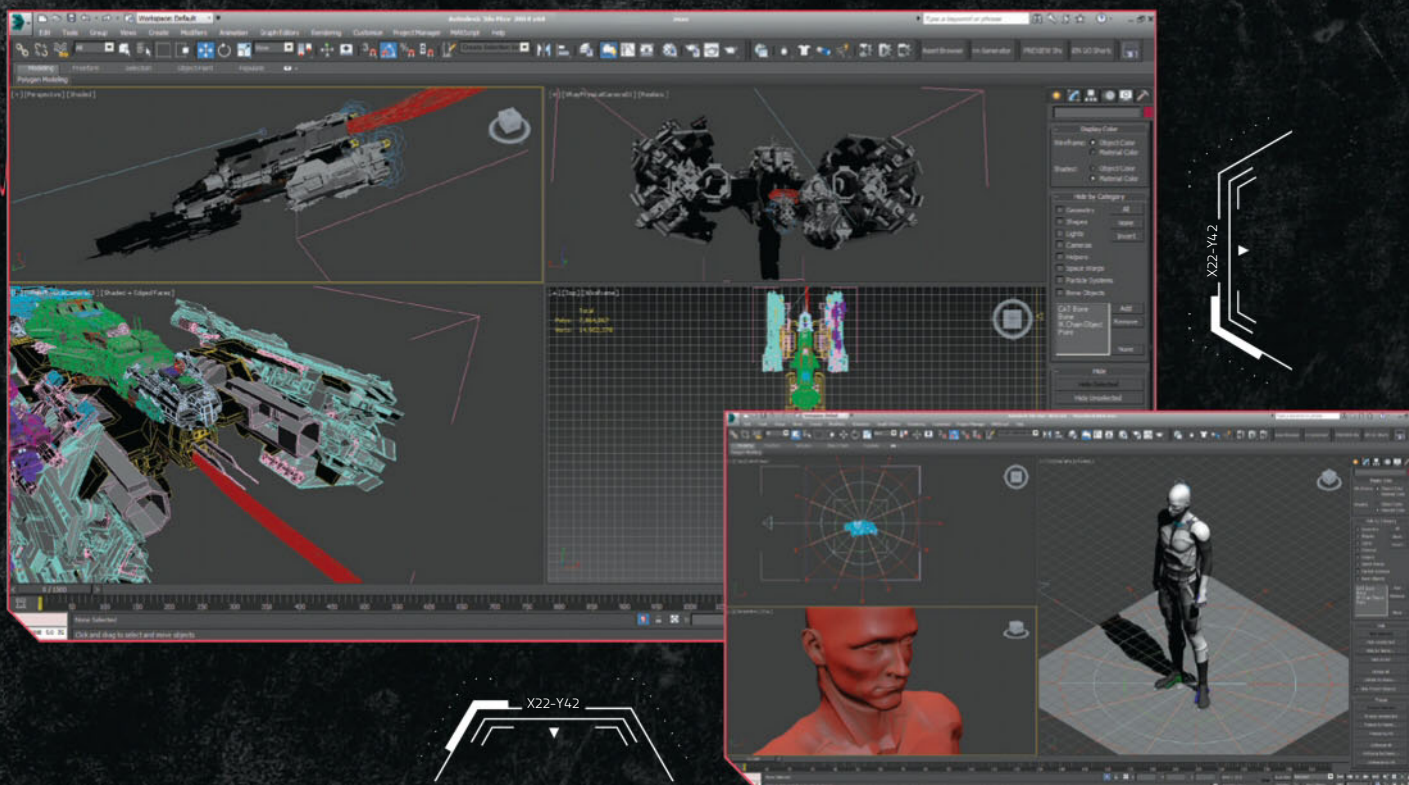
Chris: I'm not a space captain.

NAG: *Not yet! One more Kickstarter...*

Chris & Nic: *Laughs*

Nic: In terms of the story, we made it a bit personal. And we made the story small, although there are big things happening around John – the world is very big. John is there in a pivotal moment in time, but he's not necessarily going to fix the world, and he doesn't really want to. He's kind of like Isaac Clarke in the beginning of *Dead Space* where he just happened to be in that place looking for his girlfriend. But once you have that connection to the player, you can make things very personal, in terms of his drive and his emotive state.

Chris: For a lot of people, you immediately



understand that someone would do anything to save their child. It's not something that you really have to explain. Like *The Last of Us* did that fantastically, that first scene immediately sets up the relationship for Joel and Ellie for the rest of the game. [Naughty Dog] obviously had to develop the relationship between them, but they didn't have to explain the foundation of it past that point.

NAG: *What sort of effect do you think the isometric view has on the storytelling?*

Chris: It's quite an experimental thing, to have an adventure game like this, with an emotional story from an isometric perspective. I'll be interested to see if people do actually connect with the characters and story, since it's being told from such a disconnected point-of-view. I don't know how people are going to receive it. I really don't know. It's terrifying. But it'll be cool to see if people do respond to it emotionally, when you're not necessarily attached from a visual point of view.

NAG: *You've got two talented musicians working on the game. What has it been like working with them?*

Nic: At this point we're just waiting for one track from Daniel, who's going to score the trailer. We've given him a cut and he'll custom-make the music to fit the video. Mark is finished with his work. Obviously he does TV and huge triple-A games, so to get him to do something like this is fantastic.

When Mark contacted us through Kickstarter he was very excited. Initially he was only going to do two or three tracks, but

in total he did seven. He said that it's some of the best music he's ever done. And we never critted his work; Chris gave him an emotion brief, and we gave him a lot of concept art. Mark went through a lot of his own emotional stuff in the last year, so he just went crazy with the emotive sounds.

Chris: With the music, I wanted it to seem like this entire thing is taking place in John's head. He's applying the music emotionally to what he's feeling. He's hearing bits and pieces of it somewhere, not sure if it's real or if it's not real. Like, did I actually hear that tune in the background, or is it just part of the noise of the ship?

When you have such a detached point-of-view of the character – the isometric view – you really have to do something to engage the player. You can't just do jump scares all the time, they're very cheap.

NAG: *There's a lot of writing in Stasis, how did you manage all of it?*

Nic: As well as the script, we also have all of the diary entries. Chris wrote about half of the entries, then wrote a treatment for the rest. We didn't want them all to feel like they were written by the same person. Everyone has different writing styles, so we thought we'd bring on a couple of freelance writers. We got people from all over the world to contribute. We paid them for their time – apparently that's an unknown thing; they were pretty excited to get paid!

50,000 words of writing came in. It was a lot. Chris wrote the skeleton for each character, how many diary entries we wanted and what points had to be hit in each.

Chris: My thing with the game is that every dead body has a story to tell. John could easily have been one of them. So I set it up that some people had relationships with other people. There's an ex-girlfriend, some people broke up and then dated another person. One person is in love with another person but can't tell them.

Nic: Each character is written by a different person but we told them what had to happen. It was very cool, and some of the guys were quite funny. But once we got all this writing in, we had South Africans, UK writers, US-based, and some Canadian writers – it was all over the place. American grammar is very specific – we had some Kickstarter backers who claimed some of the text we had was grammatically incorrect but we thought it was fine. So we had to choose a region and edit everything to that region. The three editors we used were all American and they Americanised everything and gave it back to us. We then put all of that text into the game and we'll then have to output all of that once we've done the beta to get it translated into five additional languages (French, Russian, Polish, German, and Spanish).

NAG
- GeometriX



HARDWIRED

by Neo Sibeko

The only time I didn't care for numbers. Having worked with computers for over a decade, no actually for as long as I could put together a computer, I've rarely ever been concerned with anything but speed or performance. Rather, I've always appreciated design and quality but these are things that, as far as I was concerned, are too subjective to be of any meaningful discussion.

After all, with so many varying opinions it's near impossible to objectively say what is attractive outright and what isn't. At the very least, even the overtly unsightly things on the planet have buyers. Case in point, the original FIAT Multipla – if you've not seen this work of what can only be described as tears in motion, then do Google it (you may need a hug afterwards).

I recently had to make a decision between two notebooks, seeing as the trusted one I had used for many years had reached the end of its usefulness. Despite numerous upgrades, it was no longer capable of playing the titles I needed it to on the road and, given just how much of a stickler I am for graphics, it was time. As such my decision was easily made: buy the most powerful notebook under R11,000, or there about. This was obviously not going to be a high-end model but given that the one I was using made use of the old HD5000 series core from as early as 2009, anything released in 2014 or 2015 would be better. Thus, the choice seemed straightforward.

When I got to the desired store after having made a few phone calls, I looked at the model I had in mind and was somewhat less than moved by it. Sure the specifications were what I wanted, but it just didn't look right. You know that feeling of getting to a store and you're underwhelmed by what's presented to you? Granted I see hundreds of computer components and many notebooks a year and I am not easily impressed, but I expected to feel some kind of excitement, if only to offset the feeling of being broke after investing that much into a machine that I would essentially use once or twice a month depending on my travel schedule.

Looking at its matte black podgy casing I was anything but impressed. The specifications read correctly but I was just not impressed. It looked like a budget, low-end gaming notebook. It was made to hit a target price and this showed. Oddly enough the presence of an optical drive drove this point home

more than anything else. The one device or accessory I haven't needed nor wanted in years. Upon closer inspection I noticed inconsistent panel gaps, and some rough edges. All of which further made me very sure that perhaps I should either spend more for a better unit or look at another brand entirely.

Fortunately, there was another store next to the one I was at and asking the sales assistant what they had for the same price, I was greeted with a machine that had an inferior CPU, an inferior GPU, but had significantly better build quality. It looked better as well, but like I said earlier that's very subjective. It was primarily the build quality that did it for me. Meticulous spacing between the keys, a uniform red backlit keyboard that didn't flex, consistent panel gaps and of course the screen. This unit made use of an IPS display and the booming sound wasn't so much better as it was louder. Let's face it, given the small dimensions of both notebooks, I was never going to get anything resembling a deep bass, but if I'm not getting that I may as well get a notebook that is loud enough to actually watch movies or listen to shallow pop music on. In the end I ended up picking the latter notebook. Yes in gaming and in benchmarks it was inferior, but it was better built, slimmer, lighter, looked more robust, sounded better and that screen was something of a marvel.

Ultimately, I ended up returning it and opting for a higher-end model, but the point is I never went back to the other vendor. I'm still living off sweet bread, corn flakes and water, but it is worth it. Despite the numbers disagreeing, I believe I chose the right notebook in the end.

NAG

Geographic location:

25.017226,121.506378

Favourite flower:

Valerianella olitoria

Enjoys physical activities such as hula hooping and jump roping.

PSU

Corsair AX1500i PSU
R5,799 / www.corsair.com



GRAPHICS

EVGA GTX 980 Classified
R11,999 / www.evga.com



OS DRIVE

OCZ Vector 150
R2,899 / www.ocz.com



STORAGE DRIVE

WD Black 4TB FZEX
R2,999 / www.wdc.com



CHASSIS

Corsair Obsidian 900D
R4,299 / www.corsair.com



DISPLAY

ASUS VG248QE
R5,999 / www.asus.com



KEYBOARD

Razer BlackWidow Ultimate
R1,899 / www.razerzone.com



COOLER

Cooler Master Nepton 280L
R1,499 / www.coolermaster.com



MOUSE

GAMDIAS Zeus gaming mouse
R869 / www.gamdias.com



MOUSE MAT

Razer Ironclad
R599 / www.razerzone.com



SOUND

Creative Sound Blaster ZxR
R3,599 / www.soundblaster.com



HEADPHONES

HyperX Cloud
R1,099 / www.kingston.com



INTEL

INTEL CORE I7 5960X
R13,999 / www.intel.com

MSI X99S XPOWER AC
R6,199 / www.msi.com

CORSAIR VENGEANCE LPX DDR4 2,800MHZ 16GB KIT
R5,799 / www.corsair.com



AMD

AMD FX 8350
R2,999 / www.amd.com

ASUS CROSSHAIR V FORMULA-Z
R3,699 / www.asus.com

CORSAIR VENGEANCE PRO 2,666MHZ C11 16GB KIT
R3,899 / www.corsair.com



INTEL DREAM MACHINE

R69,555



AMD DREAM MACHINE

R54,155

NOTEBOOK GPUS

GTX 850M

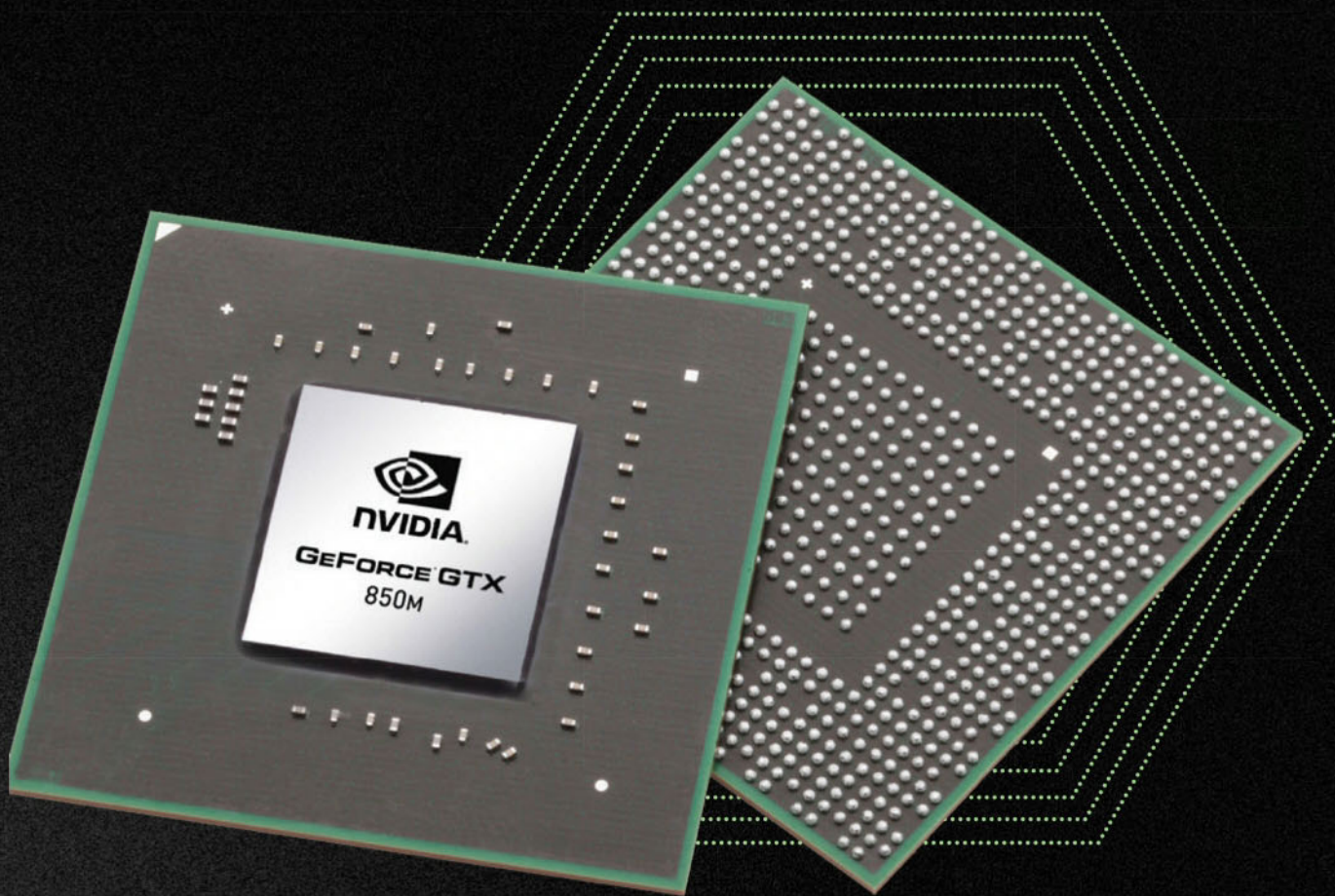


VERSUS

GTX 860M

Notebook GPUs, unlike desktop ones, come in a variety of configurations. What qualifies as a particular GPU model number on a notebook is not as clearly defined as with desktop GPUs. Thus you must exercise extreme caution when picking your notebook and make doubly sure you're getting what you want. NVIDIA and AMD only stipulate a possible configuration for each model, and not what you'll receive on your notebook. The performance difference between what is listed as a possible configuration and what you get could be as large as 50% depending on the notebook.

This month for Versus we look at the two most common GPUs on low- to mid-range notebooks and list a few differences between them. Obviously budget more often than not will dictate what you buy, but whatever it is you decide on, be mindful of what you're likely to get rather than what NVIDIA provides as a reference.



GTX 850M

▶ MEMORY AND BANDWIDTH

The 850M GPU supports both GDDR3 and GDDR5 on a 128-bit bus and in theory that allows up to 80GB/s with the specified 5GHz GDDR5 memory. However, you're unlikely to find many notebooks with this GPU that use this configuration. As it is a budget GPU and vendors want to use it as a selling point rather than its actual performance, most 850M powered notebooks make use of GDDR3 clocked at a lowly 2GHz (1GHz SDR) which brings the total GPU bandwidth down to 32GB/s. Less than half of what is possible with the more advanced memory. The DRAM size as well will vary from 2GB to 8GB on some models. 2GB is more than enough because this GPU will never be able to power anything above 1080p with no AA, so any amount of memory over and above that is purely academic. The largest difference perhaps between the 850M and the 860M is the memory type.

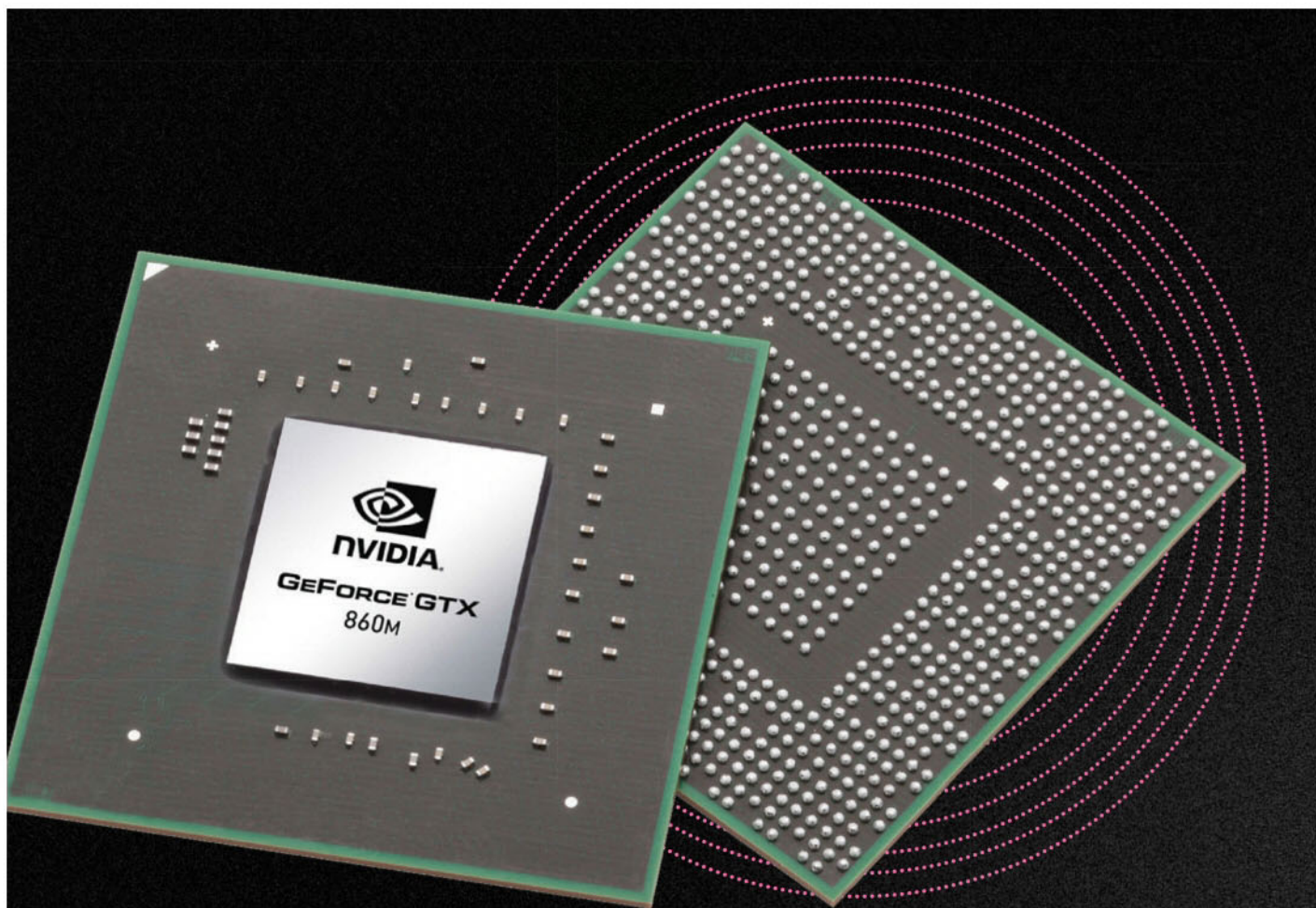
▶ GPU CORE AND CLOCK SPEED

The GTX 850M GPU is based on the GM107 core as found on the desktop GTX 750 Ti.

Obviously it's not as powerful, but it is the same Maxwell architecture (similar to the GTX 970 and 980, but they are a little more advanced) that you're familiar with. The core has 640 compute units, 32 render outputs (ROPS) or rasteriser units and 40 texture samplers. Compared to the GTX 750 Ti, the clock speed is significantly lower at around 900MHz or so. DirectX support is up to 11.2 or 12 with the right driver and operating system. Most features are supported much like on the desktop part, but ones such as DSR are of no use with this GPU as it's far too weak to support any amount of anti-aliasing or super sampling. The important thing to know about the 850M is that, unlike the 860M, it is always the GM107 core and you're at least guaranteed a low power draw GPU, which should bode well for your battery life. For those adventurous with overclocking, the 850M will typically go above 1,000MHz but be advised that this will compromise your cooling capabilities on the notebook and will likely lead to premature death unless aftermarket cooling is applied.

▶ PERFORMANCE

If all 850M GPUs were configured the way that NVIDIA has the spec written on their website, then the gaming performance would be adequate. Some high-end gaming notebooks that feature this GPU actually use GDDR5 and on those units performance is good. However on most budget notebooks they are relegated to clock speeds no higher than 902MHz and use GDDR3. This means games are not playable at 1080p unless they are set at the lowest possible graphics fidelity. 3DMark numbers reveal this but they do not illustrate just how poor this GPU is at games when paired with the older memory type. If this is your only option you may consider a notebook instead with the Intel Iris Pro 5200 GPU as that offers, in practice, better performance even though the GPU is vastly inferior. For old games the 850M in all configurations will do, but games such as *Crysis 3* are unplayable regardless of the settings you use.



GTX 860M

1 MEMORY AND BANDWIDTH

The 860M GPU like the 850M supports both GDDR3 and GDDR5 but it is almost always configured with 5GHz GDDR5. Thus you're going to get a respectable 80GB/s which isn't too far off what the desktop GTX 750 Ti offers. With such bandwidth, 1080p gaming is possible with some sacrifice in pixel quality of course. Some vendors have paired their 860M GPUs with slightly higher clock speed memory to provide anything up to 84GB/s which obviously increases performance. Frame buffer size as with the 850M is usually anything from 2 to 8GB on rare occasions. Usually it will be paired with either 2 or 4GB of memory, which is more than enough for the kind of performance you're looking at with this GPU. For this you're likely to pay a small premium, but it is worth it as it will make the difference between a playable game and one that is a slide show. Under no circumstances should you consider a GTX 860M GPU if it's paired with GDDR3. In such a case you should opt for the 850M instead and save the cash difference.

2 GPU CORE AND CLOCK SPEED

The 860M is one troublesome GPU. It comes in two flavours, the Kepler 1172 CUDA core version (GK104) and the newer, more efficient, and faster 640 CUDA core Maxwell variant like the 850M. The problem is there's no way to know the difference unless you check it using GPU-Z and as such before you purchase, it is worth finding out exactly which GPU ASIC it is using, as the latter is a little faster while drawing less power. Clock speed for the Maxwell version is 1,036MHz and over, but for the Kepler based core it's 736MHz or so. For the Maxwell version Turbo clocks may be even higher as it runs much cooler and thus has more headroom. Technically, these two are identical in feature support. NVIDIA does not differentiate between the two in the drivers and for all intents and purposes they are the same GPU. The configuration for the Maxwell version is also identical to what we have with the 850M with 32 ROPS/40 Texture samplers but this time with a guaranteed 128-bit GDDR5 bus. DirectX support is the same as well.

3 PERFORMANCE

This is truly the GPU you should consider for anything called a gaming notebook. It plays all modern games at low to medium detail levels at full HD. Some of the older games can even be played at high detail levels and if you go even further back there may be some titles that allow AA use from 2010 or so. For gaming this is clearly the superior GPU and with the clock speed advantage it even beats the GDDR5 version or the 850M. The only way to improve on this GPU is to opt for the new GTX 965M or the 970M and higher. These are significantly more expensive but they will allow much better graphics settings in games. As far as budget to mid-range GPUs are concerned however this is the GPU to beat. Depending on how much more you'll have to pay for it, it may be worth investing the additional cash and opting for this as it will last you much longer than the typical 850M powered notebook, and offer a much better gaming experience in today's games. **NAG**

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ADATA XPG DDR4 2,800MHz 16GB

Website / www.adata.com

ERP / R4,500

Supplier / ADATA

SPECS

FREQUENCY	2,800MHz
TIMINGS	17-17-17-35 (XMP 2.0)
VOLTAGE	1.2V

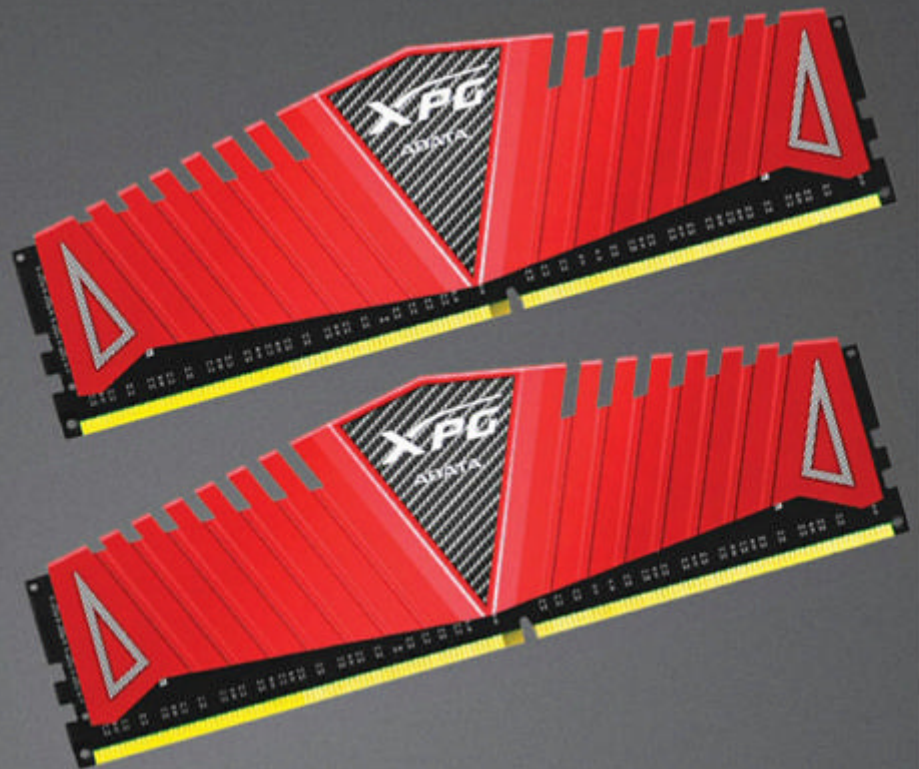
Here we are again with another DDR4 set, this time from ADATA, one of the largest DRAM vendors on the market.

ADATA is well versed with high performance enthusiast grade DRAM and, in line with that, has manufactured a high performance DDR4 kit. 2,800MHz isn't amazing by any stretch of the imagination, but do not forget that the rated voltage is only 1.2V. This is lower than the 1.35V of every other high performance overclocking set of DDR4 on the market. Given such a low voltage, there is plenty of headroom for overclocking using high voltage. For most users you'll not need higher speeds especially if you're not planning on increasing your UNCORE clock speed. In such a case the increased memory frequency will mean very little to you in performance, at least on the X99 platform. This may not hold true for the upcoming Skylake CPUs but we will have to wait and see how that platform deals with DDR4.

As always, memory speed for gaming only makes a difference at the high and low side of frequencies. That is, if you're running DDR4 at 2,133MHz and compare it to 3,200MHz you'll notice a sizeable increase in performance. Oddly enough this is true for even gaming at high resolutions. For those who are using multi-GPU configurations this is even more important because bandwidth across the various sub-systems is essential and you want the highest possible performance available to maximize your GPU investment. Thus, such a set of RAM should be considered high-end/enthusiast grade even though it isn't necessarily the fastest memory on the market. At this price and with the performance it can deliver, especially when operated at 3,200MHz it's for those with deep pockets and very powerful machines.

The number 3,200 is significant because in terms of performance it is to DDR4 what 2,400MHz was to DDR3. Given how easily this DRAM operates at 3,200MHz, we found no reason to operate it at the given 2,800MHz frequency, and this was the speed we tested with.

Visually ADATA has stuck to their guns in



heat sink design but where colours go, has limited this set to red only. We aren't partial in any way to lights, but we would like to see the Z1 series in other colours as well (other than gold) because at present this kit looks best only with the ASROCK/MSI Gaming and ASUS boards only, which means if you have a GIGABYTE overclocking board you're left out. Fortunately it does pair well with the G1 series at the very least. Some LED illumination or active cooling as well would be appreciated, but again is not a must-have.

If we had to pick a set of memory between the various brands and models around, we would consider the ADATA set if only because it offers a slightly more appealing heat spreader than the CORSAIR LPX set we reviewed several issues ago. That set had a 3,000MHz profile, which this kit doesn't but it's academic because you may still load the X.M.P profile on this set and manually select the frequency to 3,000MHz and it'll work just as well as mentioned before. There's nothing between them really.

At the time of writing the only difference we found between this kit and the only other 2,800MHz set we tested is in motherboard overclocking capacity. Right

now, the ADATA XPG kit performs uniformly across motherboards with exception to the incredible SOC-Champion motherboard, which is without question the best DRAM overclocking motherboard available on the market. This may very well be an isolated incident but it is worth noting if you're looking for those super high frequencies north side of 3,400MHz.

That aside, this is a great set, the price is still steep but then again you do get what you pay for. Do consider this set if you're in the market for some enthusiast grade DDR4.

NAG

- Neo Sibeko

8

The XPG DDR4 set is as competent a 2,800MHz kit as they come. With the ability to run 3,200MHz with relative ease, it is worth your consideration.

PLUS / 3,200MHz capable / Decent heat sink design

MINUS / Pricing is still an issue which is true for all high-performance DDR4 / Only comes in red

COUGAR 700M gaming mouse

Website / www.cougar-world.com

ERP / R934 Supplier / COUGAR

S P E C S	BUTTONS	Eight, programmable
	SENSOR	Laser, 8,200 DPI
	POLLING RATE	1,000Hz
	RESPONSE TIME	1ms
	CABLE LENGTH	1.8 metres

I'd never seen nor heard of the COUGAR brand before getting my hands on their 700M gaming mouse, but it was abundantly clear from the packaging alone that the German manufacturer means business. Remove it from its fancy container and the 700M is instantly reminiscent of the Cyborg R.A.T. series of gaming mice, with its modular, customisable design and Terminator aesthetic. You'll find two interchangeable palm rests in the box: the regular one, and a sleeker one which COUGAR says enables "Sport Mode", but that's really just marketing fluff. More importantly, the connected palm rest can be easily raised or lowered using a knob on the underside of the mouse, which means you can quickly set it up to accommodate whatever style of grip you prefer.

Despite its bulky appearance, the 700M is a remarkably light mouse. If you prefer a heavier mouse, its weight can be adjusted using the supplied weights. Its careful contours ensure that overall it's a highly comfortable gaming mouse, even without all its customisable bits, but bear in mind that it's solely designed for right-handed gamers. The only real concern I have with the 700M's design is in its thumb button placement; gamers with large thumbs may find themselves accidentally hitting the "Sniper" button (which lowers the mouse's sensitivity when held, to allow for more precise aiming) on the base of the thumb rest, or the two buttons above it.

Other than that, there's nothing to dislike about this mouse. Its software is concise and easy to navigate, and allows further customisation of macros, lighting and more.

NAG

- Dane Remendes



9

COUGAR's 700M is an outstanding gaming mouse, boasting all the flash and confidence of bigger, more established brands.

PLUS / Impressively comfortable / Customisable design

MINUS / Thumb button placement isn't ideal

HyperX Fury 240GB SSD

Website / www.kingston.com

ERP / R1,999 Supplier / Kingston

S P E C S	CACHE	None
	CONTROLLER	SF-2281
	INTERFACE	SATA 6Gbps
	CAPACITY	240GB

The simplest and possibly cheapest way to bring SSD performance to the masses over the last four years has been with SandForce controllers. These are not the fastest on the market, but they do offer solid performance and affordability like no other controller.

The HyperX Fury then should have very familiar performance to you because much like many other budget SSDs, it makes use of the tried and tested SF-2281 and sixteen 20nm ONFi 3 128Gbit NAND ICs. As usual there's no cache here, but that's fine as there's plenty performance along with the latest AHCI features. The HyperX Fury is what we'd call a no-nonsense drive that goes about delivering good performance at a reasonable price. There's no migration software, adapter, or any other unnecessary additions included in the package.

It's a blister pack with your SSD and that's about it. In line with the other Kingston V300 drive, it offers near identical performance. It comes ahead in some tests but loses out in others and at the end these drives only really differ in firmware rather than anything physical. We recorded speeds above the 400MB/s respectively for both reads and writes which is more than enough for gaming and even most power users. Given how aggressive the naming is though we did expect slightly better performance. However as it is, there's more than enough for the price. The Fury SSD will not break any performance records and certainly isn't as surprising as the other Fury products (mainly the headphones and memory) but it does get the job done.

At just under R2,000 for 240GB of space, it's hard to find fault with the drive. With many high performance 120GB drives selling for two thirds of this price, the Fury is a steal. Shopping on a budget for an SSD has never been easier and this one comes highly recommended.

NAG

- Neo Sibeko



8

The HyperX Fury SSD offers great value for money and is the drive to beat at this price point.

PLUS / Better than average performance / Keen pricing

MINUS / IOPS performance could do with some tuning

AORUS THUNDER K7 Gaming Keyboard

Website / www.arous.com

ERP / R2,049

Supplier / Rectron

SPECS	WEIGHT	1,500g
	DIMENSIONS	454x257x45mm
	CABLE LENGTH	2m
	OS SUPPORT	Windows XP/Vista/7/8



If you cast your mind back a few years you may remember the GIGABYTE Osmium mechanical gaming keyboard. At the time this was a highly impressive keyboard with plenty of features that many competing products at the time did not have. It didn't have a single feature that you couldn't find anywhere else, but it was the combination that made it so great. It was for the longest time our Dream Machine keyboard.

The THUNDER K7 could essentially be looked at as a successor of sorts to the Osmium. For the most part these are identical keyboards and it isn't surprising given the relationship between GIGABYTE and the AORUS brand. That does not mean however that this is an identical keyboard under a different brand. It is not and for all the similarities aesthetically, in function they are very different. As always with gaming keyboards we first saw this model more than a year ago at a trade show but it took a while before it made it to market and even when it did, the launch was fairly silent.

What we have here is another unique offering that should cater to almost all gamers but particularly those who dislike the standard gaming keyboard layout. The big selling feature here is the removable macro keypad. This is the standard button layout that you would find on the right side

of a regular keyboard but have a secondary function as macro keys from 1 to 20 (G keys). These keys work as normal number pad keys as well. Being removable is great in itself, but that it can be attached to the opposite side (left) of the keyboard is even better. For those who prefer the number pad instead of the standard WASD layout, you no longer have to shift your keyboard to the extreme left to game comfortably. You simply detach on the right and place it on the left hand side. The keypad has an independent LED system and thus you can have it turned on while the rest of the keyboard is off, or have them at different brightness levels.

This single feature, over and above providing 20 macro keys, makes all the other shortcomings of the THUNDER K7 bearable. In isolation they don't mean much but if you remember the original Osmium keyboard you'll lament the absence of an audio pass-through system for the microphone and headset. No longer will you have easy access via the rear of the keyboard to these two peripheral jacks as they've been removed. Disappointing, because this was a distinguishing feature of the Osmium. In addition to this there's the absence of a USB 3.0 hub which was available on the Osmium. There's no

technical reasons why these were removed, but they do take away from what could have made the THUNDER K7 the most feature-packed or at least versatile gaming keyboard on the market. These were not gimmicks but features that had practical everyday applications. Compared to other gaming keyboards on the market today, the K7 is still one of the more unique offerings and gives a flexibility which isn't present anywhere else. Be it you prefer the shorter keyboards similar to the ones that CMStorm has offered recently or a full size but highly customisable keyboard, the AORUS THUNDER K7 is what you need. The pricing may be steep, but by all other accounts it is a fantastic keyboard.

- Neo Sibeko

8

The THUNDER K7 is a unique keyboard that offers flexibility like no other on the market.

PLUS / Good build quality / Removable keypad / Simple, straightforward software

MINUS / No audio pass-through / Only one USB hub / Missing several useful features

Corsair K70 RGB keyboard

Website / www.corsair.com ERP / R2,499 Supplier / Rectron

SPECS

DIMENSIONS

438x163x24mm



Corsair has been persistent in their drive for gaming peripheral dominance, from their early efforts to the latest RGB keyboard such as this one. Their market share grows at a phenomenal rate and there seems to be no stopping the company from reaching all gamers and taking market share away from the much older players. One of their latest offerings, the K70 RGB keyboard, was first introduced to us eight months ago at COMPUTEX 2014, but it took some time to make it to market. With the hiccup caused by the changing of the logo (not well received to say the least) and subsequent return of the original Corsair logo, it's a keyboard that has been long in the waiting.

What we have here is the typical Corsair flair with solid build quality and an attention to detail that many competitors could learn from. The K70 is a sturdy keyboard that is built to be rugged and withstand some abuse. The brushed aluminium chassis is, as always, impressive, and the feel of the keys is second to none. Even before you use the keyboard, the initial impression is that you're looking at a fairly expensive keyboard, which this one is. More about that later though. Much like the original K70, it makes use of Cherry MX switches. The model we received used the red switches, but we

did read that there may be other options available in the future as well, if not already available by the time you read this.

Visually there isn't much to the keyboard, but the black anodized aluminium does go a long way into delivering that quality look and feel that perhaps justifies the very high price tag. It is the little touches and nuances that make the K70 appealing and its quality only grows on you the longer you use it. Key presses are precise and crisp. Even though this is mostly dictated by the switches, there's that unmistakable click that you get when typing on a Corsair keyboard and it's on the K70 RGB as well. Mechanically, as well as where build quality and aesthetics go, there's no faulting the K70 RGB, as it delivers on its promise.

Software is probably where the things don't work out as well as they should. The software package is cumbersome and very confusing. For instance trying to make a solid colour for the WASD keys, which is different from the rest of the keyboard, could prove to be a mission. The software suite is far too convoluted and is the one big negative about the entire K70 RGB experience. It is needlessly complicated and basic functionality and programmability for the keyboard is lost as a result. Fortunately it is just software and can be easily remedied

with an update.

Where keyboard features are concerned we are still not a fan of the dual USB cable scheme as it serves no purpose at all especially since the K70 does not feature a hub. At such a steep price, at the very least we would expect to be able to plug a mouse into the keyboard, given that it already uses or rather can make use of two USB ports. Overall this is a worthy successor to the original K70 and in fact given just how much more reliable the LEDs are, it's in all conceivable ways better than the original version. The price is a little hard to swallow but for that you do get unmatched build quality and workmanship. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

8

The K70 RGB is a worthy successor to the original K70 and better in all possible ways.

PLUS / Great build quality / Black anodised aluminium looks striking / Almost unlimited colour combinations

MINUS / No audio pass-through / Only one USB 2.0 port / Very expensive

Acer Aspire V15 Nitro Black Edition



Website / www.acer.com ERP / R16,999 Supplier / Acer

SPECS

CPU	Intel Core i7 4210H
GPU	NVIDIA GTX 860M 2GB
MEMORY	8GB DDR3 1,600MHz (dual channel)
STORAGE	1TB 5,400rpm SSHD (8GB NAND)
OPTICAL DRIVE	None
WEIGHT	2.4kg

If we all had unlimited resources at our disposal, we would all have the most powerful, slimmest notebooks on the market. All powered by the latest generation GTX 980M (or two) with several SSDs or M.2 drives in RAID. 4K panels and all the bells and whistles you are likely to find in the GT80 TITAN SLI for example. However, there aren't many people who can afford close to R50,000 on a gaming notebook.

The vast majority of us look to notebooks below the R20,000 mark and this is where the Acer Aspire V15 Nitro Black Edition comes in. Just in case you were wondering, this is a series of notebooks rather than a specific model. They range in drive configuration, DRAM capacity, CPU, and display type. The basic mould however is the same and at the time of writing they were all powered by the GTX 860M. An important thing to note given that this is what ultimately determines gaming performance, at least more meaningfully than the CPU.

This particular model we have uses a budget Intel Core i5, dual core (with hyper-threading) 4210H CPU. This CPU is a high frequency version of the 4210U which is available on other V15 Nitro notebooks from Acer. The difference here is that the 4210H has a significantly higher clock speed with TURBO frequencies reaching 3.5GHz as opposed to the 2.7GHz of the 4210U. When it comes to gaming, since both are dual core units, the higher frequency 4210H makes a noticeable difference in just about every title that the notebooks can handle. The models with the 4710H are obviously even more powerful, but they occupy a different price bracket subsequently and as far as gaming is concerned don't offer better frame rates at the same resolution (GPU bound by the GTX 860M).

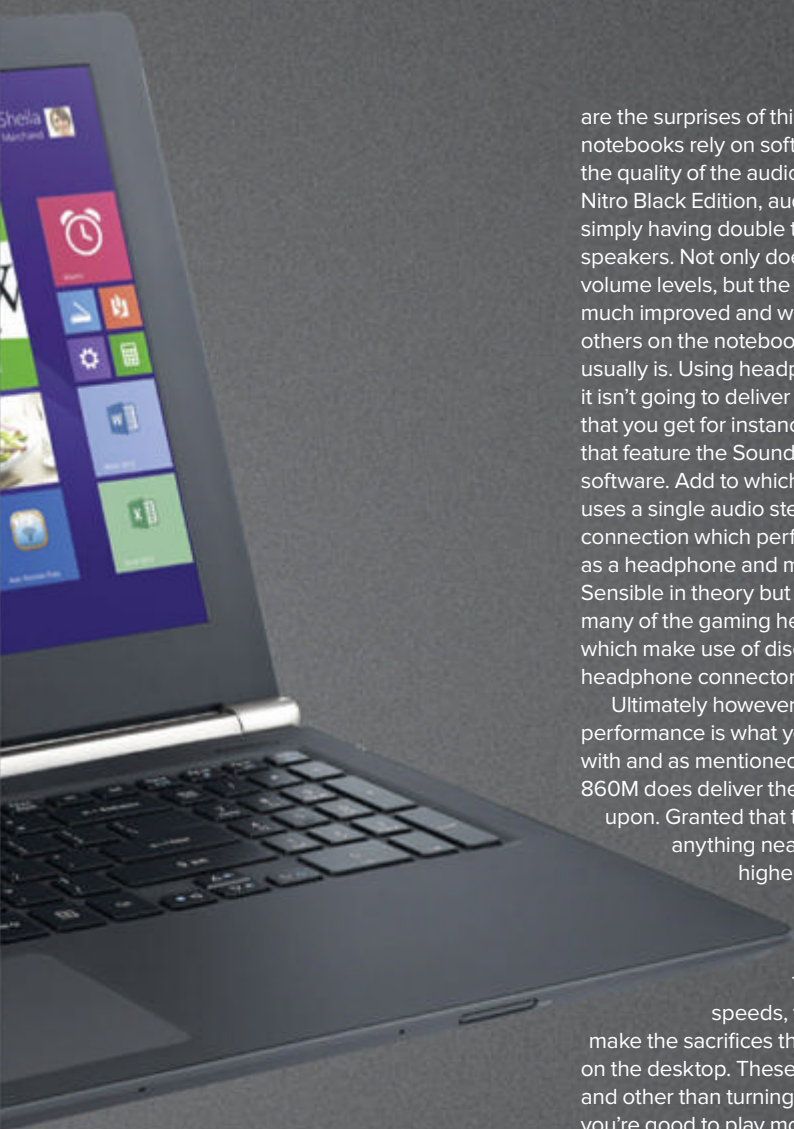
The Nitro V15 Black Edition is fairly well built with no glaring signs of poor workmanship or lack of refinement. As always these are not going to match your typical Apple MacBook quality, but they do

come respectably close. The keyboard is devoid of any flexing even when pressed hard, and there's a shallow but satisfying click to the keys. Backlighting isn't as elaborate as what you'll find on the GAMING series from MSI for instance, as it's a simple red LED-based system. It is either on or off. It works surprisingly well even though perhaps a white light would have been more neutral than a red one. Still, it's great that Acer has chosen to include it in all their models, even the ones that aren't part of the Black series.

Simplicity is where this notebook shines.

There aren't too many gimmicks here and what you get is a solid performing, well-built computer with enough power to play most of today's games at low to medium graphics quality at the native resolution. Speaking of the display resolution, the 15.6" IPS display works wonderfully offering rich colours and definition even at the more extreme viewing angles. As far as notebook displays go, it's right up there with the best of them. It could stand to be a little brighter at times, but that is hardly enough to take away from the overall impression it gives. The display along with the four speaker audio system





BENCHMARK RESULTS

PCMark 8 Creative Suite
(OpenCL accelerated): **4721**
Battery time: **2H:02m:30s**
3DMark Fire Strike: **3527**
Tomb Raider DX11 1080p: **43.6**

are the surprises of this notebook. Most notebooks rely on software to improve the quality of the audio, but on the V15 Nitro Black Edition, audio is improved by simply having double the usual number of speakers. Not only does this allow higher volume levels, but the stereo effect is much improved and watching movies with others on the notebook isn't the chore it usually is. Using headphones is better, but it isn't going to deliver the audio quality that you get for instance with notebooks that feature the Sound Blaster Cinema 2 software. Add to which, this Acer notebook uses a single audio stereo mini-jack 3.5mm connection which performs a dual function as a headphone and microphone jack. Sensible in theory but sadly won't support many of the gaming headsets on the market which make use of discrete microphone and headphone connectors.

Ultimately however, gaming performance is what you'll be concerned with and as mentioned earlier, the GTX 860M does deliver the goods when called upon. Granted that this won't give you anything near GTX 965M or higher performance. You're working with what is essentially a desktop GTX 750 Ti with lower clock speeds, thus you'll have to

make the sacrifices that you would expect on the desktop. These aren't many however and other than turning off anti-aliasing you're good to play most games at more than acceptable graphics fidelity. With the power disconnected obviously performance is lower and as such you'll have to settle for even lower graphics quality, but it is still far better than what the GTX 840M based GPUs would offer you. Gaming on the go is very possible especially if you limit the FPS using the GeForce Experience software. You may be able to play for anything up to two hours continuously depending on the game. General desktop performance isn't lacking either. This particular model does not have an SSD, but instead uses an SSHD from Seagate that has 8GB of NAND for caching and 1TB of drive space for storage. This makes for a fast booting system and one that is snappy on the desktop and basic productivity packages. For gaming

it is not as effective simply because game assets are massive and are more than what the 8GB NAND could cache anyway, thus the performance is relegated to that of the slower 5,400rpm platters.

Still, once the game is loaded, you'll be hard pressed to tell the difference between an SSD and this much more cost effective solution. The good thing however is that this notebook is upgradable with some work and you may be able to exchange the hybrid drive for a normal desktop 7mm SSD or use an M.2 drive instead as there's no optical drive here at all.

Overall, this is a solid notebook that packs more than enough punch to be considered a mid-range gaming notebook. There is no official local pricing yet, but should this model be made available it should retail for roughly R17,000 or less. For that price there aren't many notebooks that will put together such an impressive package in both build quality and components. The particular model we tested is the 591G-559N (again we've no idea why vendors find inspiration in serial numbers for their product names), which is essentially the entry-level Black Edition notebook. While simple in design, it is elegant and packs plenty of punch for the price. If you are able to overlook some of the minor shortcomings this is probably one of the better gaming notebooks on the market and it comes highly recommended. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

8

The Acer Aspire V15 Nitro Black Edition is exactly what a mid-range gaming notebook should be. Good performance and build quality at a reasonable price.

PLUS / Relatively quiet operation even under load / Great IPS display / Good performance

MINUS / Single audio jack for microphone and keyboard / No SSD on this particular model / No option for more powerful GPUs in the entire range

THE LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE

ASUS PB287Q True 4K ultra-high definition monitor

Website / www.asus.com

RRP / R11,000

4K. 5K. UHD. True UHD. *What does it all mean?* To be completely truthful, most of us NAGlings aren't 100% sure. We were confused enough by the difference between HD, HD ready and full HD a few years ago, so this new onslaught of acronyms has delivered a sort of intellectual apocalypse that we have very little chance of surviving. What we do know about 4K/UHD is that it makes digital things look mega-pretty, and that it provides loads more room for activities when you're working on important stuff. We've gotten our hands on the ASUS PB287Q, so we can finally attempt to dissect exactly what makes this new generation of displays so powerfully attractive.

4K? WHAT?

Right, here's the skinny: a 4K display is one which can output around 4,000 pixels on its horizontal axis. UHD displays are only capable of a resolution of 3840x2160, so technically they're not *really* 4K – but it's close enough that the industry has taken to calling them 4K screens.

WINDOW SHOPPING

ASUS' PB287Q boasts a native UHD resolution of 3840x2160, with a pixel density of 157 pixels-per-inch. In total, the screen pumps out 8,294,400 pixels across its width and height. 1080p displays only output 2,073,600 pixels. This means that the PB287Q can display four times more content than 1080p displays, with far greater detail on closer inspection.

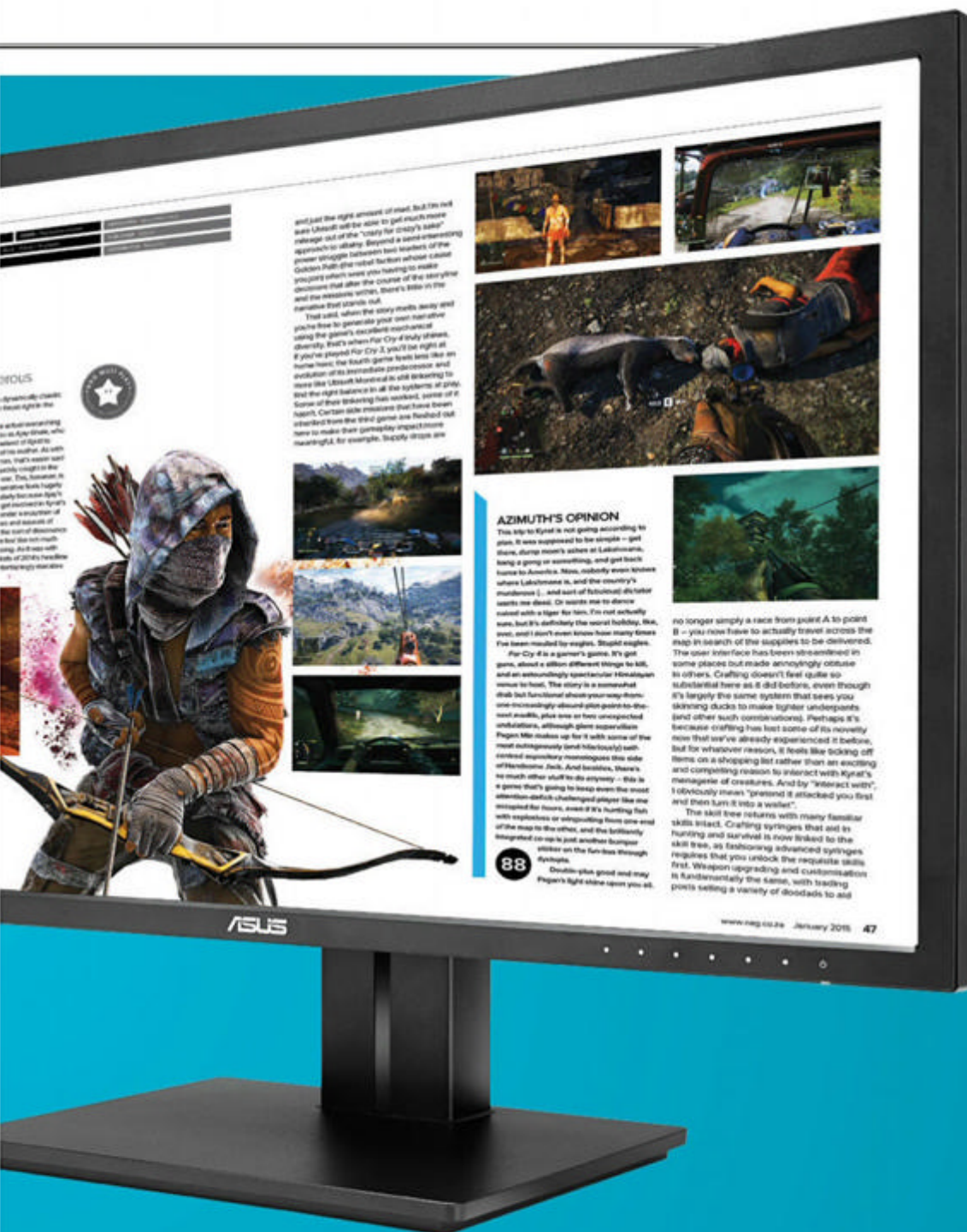
MORE SPACE THAN YOU'LL KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH

Thanks to all that extra screen space, it's entirely possible to split the screen up for serious multitasking. You could watch a 1080p movie on the top half of the screen while playing a game on the bottom half without losing any detail – provided your hardware's beefy enough to manage it, of course.

ALL TOGETHER NOW

You're able to view content from two separate sources on the same screen. Picture-in-picture mode displays one source image above the other, while picture-by-picture splits the screen in two. You can use MHL input to browse your phone's app store while simultaneously designing a presentation for work.





CUSTOMISABLE COMFORT

The display can pivot 90 degrees clockwise, tilt up and down, and have its height and swivel adjusted quickly and easily for optimum viewing. Not that it matters much: the maximum viewing angle is extraordinary.

MUCH TECH, MANY AWESOME

Naturally, there's loads of proprietary tech built in to enhance the image quality, like one which cleans up the pixel output, and another that eliminates flicker and reduces the level of blue light, ensuring less eyestrain and keeping your eyes healthy.

BUT IS IT WORTH IT?

At R11,000, it's difficult to say. Then again, if you've got the sort of money you'll need to upgrade your PC to play games at 4K resolution, maybe R11,000 doesn't equate to much. It's an immensely impressive display, and we love the fantastic image quality and increased visual real estate, especially for design work – but we won't be rushing out to replace our 1080p displays just yet.

SUMMARY

PROS

- Beautiful in almost every way

CONS

- Just look at that price. LOOK AT IT.

ALTERNATIVES

- Samsung U28D590D
- Dell P2815Q

TECHNICAL

DISPLAY SIZE / ASPECT RATIO

28-inch widescreen / 16:9

RESOLUTION:

3840x2160 at 60Hz
(DisplayPort) / 3840x2160
at 30Hz (HDMI)

RESPONSE TIME:

1ms

ASUS SMART CONTRAST RATIO (ASCR):

100000000:1

BRIGHTNESS:

330 cd/m²

COLOURS:

1073.7 million

SPEAKERS:

2x2W RMS

I/O:

2x HDMI (1 x MHL)
1x DisplayPort
3.5mm stereo jack
3.5mm headphone jack

MOSH *pit*

This month's hot list of cool stuff and everything else you simply must have. Well, almost everything.

MOJANG MINECRAFT BEGINNER'S, CONSTRUCTION, COMBAT AND REDSTONE HANDBOOKS

- Supplier / Penguin Books
- Website / www.penguinbooks.co.za
- RRP / R120 each

These books feature 80 quality pages each, bound together with snappy looking themed covers. That's 80 pages of crafting recipes, tips and tricks – including some from Markus Persson (*Minecraft* creator) and Jens Bergensten (*Minecraft* developer) and much more. Besides all the stuff you do know there is plenty here that you don't know. A quick page through doesn't do them justice as they're filled with smart tricks that even the veterans at the NAG office didn't know about, like how to make charcoal from wood and using gravel as an elevator. There's something for everyone here, even advanced concepts in the *Construction* and *Redstone* books for players with a lot more experience. They are well written, immensely detailed and perfect companions for what can easily be considered the most influential game of the decade.



RED-E RC25

- Supplier / Omnico
- Website / www.omnico.co.za
- RRP / R250

Need a quick fix to charge your cellphone, laptop, GoPro or tablet and you're not anywhere near a plug? The RED-E 2,500mAh portable charging powerbank is your answer. It has a USB port for the charge cable and a built-in micro-USB cable that re-charges the powerbank itself.



LEWIS & CLARK: THE EXPEDITION

- Supplier / Wizard's
- Website / www.wizardshouse.co.za
- RRP / R695

A game for thinkers and tacticians, *Lewis & Clark: The Expedition* is a challenging game that sees up to five players race across the US from the Mid-West to the Pacific Ocean. It uses a mix of cards and tokens to represent the characters, equipment and tokens that you'll start with and acquire along your journey. The first person across the land wins the game, and there's plenty to do along the way to help or hinder your competition (deliberately or otherwise).

This is a game that'll take some learning before you fully appreciate its nuances, but once you've got it down, you'll no-doubt appreciate its depth.



COUP

- Supplier / Wizard's
- Website / www.wizardshouse.co.za
- RRP / R250

Coup is a clever little game for up to six players that can be played in 15 minutes or less, making it a perfect filler game. Successfully Kickstarted in May 2013, *Coup* (which is set in the *Resistance* universe) pulled in a whopping \$166,390, way ahead of its goal of just \$5,000, but thankfully they kept the game design simple, instead choosing to focus on delivering a product of good quality.

The goal of *Coup* is to be the last person with character cards remaining. The game plays out in a series of turns in which players attempt to kill or disrupt the characters or actions of other players, but sneaky play over aggression is the order of the day.

Short, smart and very fun, *Coup* is a must-have for any gaming group looking to squeeze in a few extra play sessions during the day.





ZELDA HOODIE

- Supplier / Playtech
- Website / www.techfixplay.co.za
- RRP / R350

Be the hero that the world of Hyrule needs with this bright green hoodie. The front features a printed belt and on the back is a great big Hylian shield. Aside from the printing which gives this hoodie a bit of stiffness, it's silky soft and probably great for keeping you warm in winter.



ONE PIECE BAG

- Supplier / Playtech
- Website / www.techfixplay.co.za
- RRP / R200

This large, square bag features two icons of the *One Piece* anime: the Jolly Roger (complete with straw hat), and the Heart Pirates logo. Other than those two pieces of art this is just a nice bag that's ideal for taking to the beach or lugging around campus. It feels waterproof but don't take our word for it. It also features a small zipped pocket on the inside for storing any small goodies.



SELECTION OF BRILLIANTLY NERDY SHIRTS

- Supplier / Heroes of Games and Comics
- Website / www.heroesofgc.com
- RRP / R300 [T-shirts]; R650 [Polo shirts]

Assuming that you (i.e. the person reading this) are a human, you've likely encountered shirts in varying forms, colours, shapes and sizes before. Obviously we don't discriminate here, so that's not to say that only humans wear shirts – it's just that most of the non-humans (animals, extra-terrestrial life forms, NAG's art director, etc.) we've encountered prefer to roll *au naturel*.

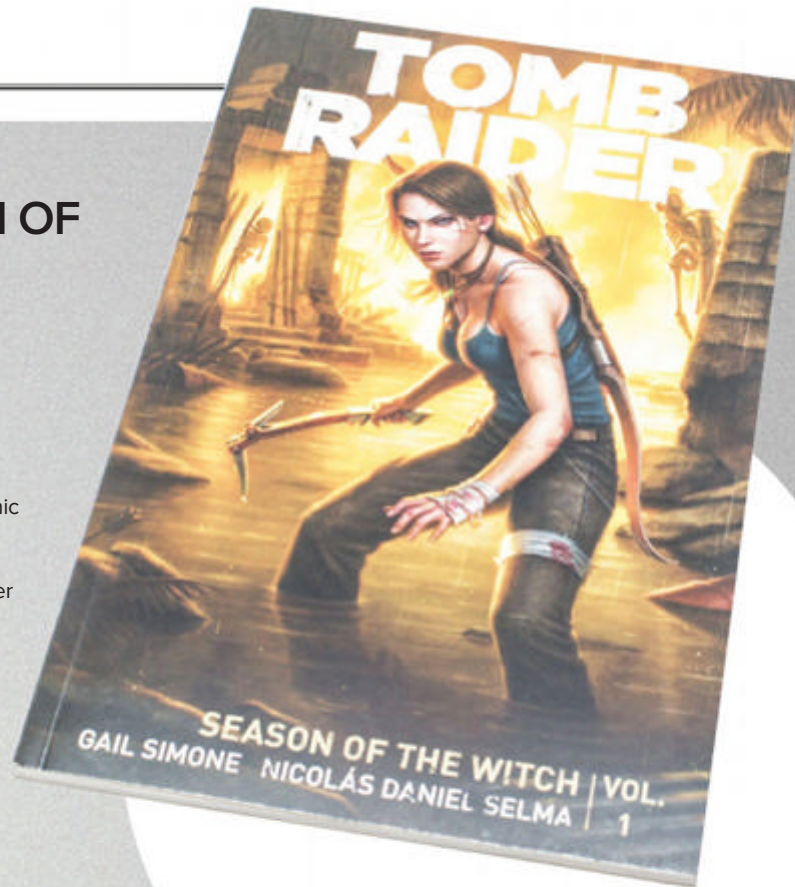
Anyway, here we have an assortment of shirts that are sure to make geeks swoon. They come in a variety of styles (from regular T-shirts to polo/golf shirts) and are themed around everything from comic books to anime to video games. We managed to get our hands on shirts based on hit franchises like *Final Fantasy*, *Hellsing*, *The Punisher*, and *Spider-Man*. If you like wearing clothing that lets the entire world know where your entertainment allegiances lie, these are a must.

🔪 TOMB RAIDER: SEASON OF THE WITCH VOL. 1 (TPB)

- 📍 Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- 🌐 Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- 💰 RRP / R269

2013's killer reboot of *Tomb Raider* was gritty and powerful, paving the way for a new Lara Croft that's relatable and at least makes a bit of sense. This comic picks up where the game left off, but instead of creating new drama and adventures, makes a vague attempt to rewrite some story elements from the game and takes over from there.

It's a weird mix of storytelling that breaks what little canon was established in the reboot, and the result is a messy story. This is made worse by the artwork that shows huge potential in some frames but then succumbs to cringeworthy character art and lazy texturework in other places. It's not all like that, but the frequency at which these issues pop up is enough to keep them on your mind throughout this book.



🔪 ANGELA: ASGARD'S ASSASSIN #1

- 📍 Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- 🌐 Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- 💰 RRP / R49

Did you know that Thor and Loki have a sister? Neither did we, but apparently this is a thing, so there you have it. She's called Angela, and she kicks ass. This first issue skips through much of the core background stuff quickly and gets right into thick of it, then infuses additional backstory elements throughout the action. It's a nice balance and a great way to introduce a character that most people won't be familiar with. This is all tied together with exceptional artwork that fits the action bits as well as it does the talky bits, and dances around a painterly style that helps break up this comic in a way that encourages a few re-reads. Well worth it for anyone who enjoys a bit of action with their Asgardian drama.



🔪 SUPERIOR IRON MAN #1

- 📍 Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- 🌐 Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- 💰 RRP / R49

After the success of *The Superior Spider-Man*, it looks like Marvel has become rather taken with the idea of making the good guys the bad guys (and vice versa), and now we have *Superior Iron Man* to continue the trend. This time there's no body-swapping, but there is a mention of a Symbiote thrown in here, so there's definitely plenty to look forward to. This is a solid issue #1 in every way, then: it sets the scene for a Tony Stark gone mad and sees someone rise to take his place. This should be a good series.



BANPRESTO DRAGONBALL Z ACTION FIGURES

- Supplier** / Heroes of Games and Comics
- Website** / www.heroesofgc.com
- RRP** / R200

Goku, Super Buu and Majin Vegeta are all featured in the selection we had a look at. With a bit of patient balancing they stand 12.7 cm tall and don't feature any moving parts. The paintwork and detailing is excellent and the characters all bear a strong resemblance to their animated counterparts. They're also indestructible and have a decent weight to them and a few hard pointy edges, making them ideal for throwing around in an office battle scenario. Good if you're a fan of the series but bad if you're on minimum wage, as they feel a little pricey for what they are.

MAX FACTORY LEVI ATTACK ON TITAN FIGMA ACTION FIGURE #213

- Supplier** / Heroes of Games and Comics
- Website** / www.heroesofgc.com
- RRP** / R900

Some things you need to know. This figure ships with five extra sets of hands, so six in total. It's not really for anyone under the age of 13 and contains many small parts. It's also the most complex figurine we've ever seen at NAG and took some time (and a little head scratching) to put together and set up – almost like a box of LEGO really. It's well constructed so everything fits together, and more importantly, holds together well. There are many extra bits and pieces in the set so you can change facial expressions, attach hooks and blades and it even ships with smoke effects, a stand for posing, and a little bag to store everything in – phew. It's pretty much worth the investment and you'll even be challenged a little in putting it together which is a rare thing indeed. This is awesome in almost every way.



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(Post Office permitting, LOL)

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GG

Geographic location: -33.92543,18.424533
Favourite flower: Nepeta cataria
 Enjoys outdoor activities such as tombstone rubbing and ghost hunting.

by Tarryn van der Byl



How Lizard Squad stole Christmas

On 25 December 2014, a hacker¹ collective calling itself "Lizard Squad" effectively shut down Xbox LIVE and the PlayStation Network with a distributed denial of service (or DDoS) attack. If you don't know what this means – and, going on the number of gaspingly outraged complaints about a "security breach" on social media, most people don't so it's okay – a DDoS attack is a forced server overload, usually by an overwhelming number of external communication requests from other, illegitimate sources². Because the server is already jammed with incoming network traffic, it is unable to respond to anything else, and the whole system crashes.

If you've ever been stuck on hold on the phone for approximately forever because all the lines are busy, even though your call is OBVIOUSLY SO MUCH MORE IMPORTANT, it's basically exactly the same thing.

In subsequent interviews with a number of online publications,

members of Lizard Squad explained, perhaps not entirely unexpectedly, that they'd done it mostly for the 4chan-proverbial "lulz"³. Oh, and just in case anybody called them out for being narcissistic jerks, also because they wanted to expose Microsoft and Sony's quote-unquote "incompetence". Gamers pay for access to online services, they argued with absolutely zero evidence of critical self-analysis whatsoever, only for those services to shut down when people like Lizard Squad do stuff like this. So, totally a humanitarian crisis... that was only (temporarily) resolved when multimillionaire internet entrepreneur Kim Dotcom paid them \$300,000 worth of premium subscription vouchers for his Mega file sharing website. Taking from the rich to, you know, keep for themselves. I'm sure we're all very impressed.

But it gets even worse.

About a week later, Lizard Squad launched their own LizardStressor botnet DDoS service. Nevermind

1 *Killind of.*

2 *Like a botnet, for example. A 12-year old kid with mom's credit card can hire a botnet. See also footnote [1] above.*

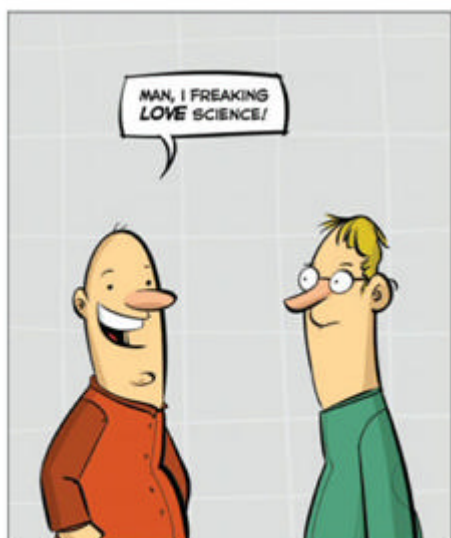
3 *"For the attention", to everybody else.*

the smug gloating, the whitehatting claims, and the blatant bribery – taking down Xbox LIVE and the PlayStation Network on Christmas was probably nothing much more than an opportunistic marketing campaign. So, in fact, the real reason they did it is simply that Lizard Squad is a bunch of terrible people.

Here's the important bit, though. According to Internet security researcher Brian Krebs, LizardStressor is powered by computers attached to compromised broadband routers. If you've not changed the default username and password on your router, and encrypted your wireless connection, you're part of the problem. Remember, your PC security program puts a motion-detected alarm system in the house, bars on the windows, and a virtual miniature dachshund at the front door to warn you when somebody knocks, but it doesn't lock the garden gate. **NAG**

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